

LORD BELLINGER

HARRY GRAHAM



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LORD BELLINGER

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A Group of Scottish Women.
The Mother of Parliaments.
The Bolster Book.
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Misrepresentative Men.
Fiscal Ballads.
Baby's Baedeker.
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A Song-Garden for Children.
More Misrepresentative Men.
Misrepresentative Women.
Familiar Faces.
Departmental Ditties.

LORD BELLINGER

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

EDITED BY
HARRY GRAHAM



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1911

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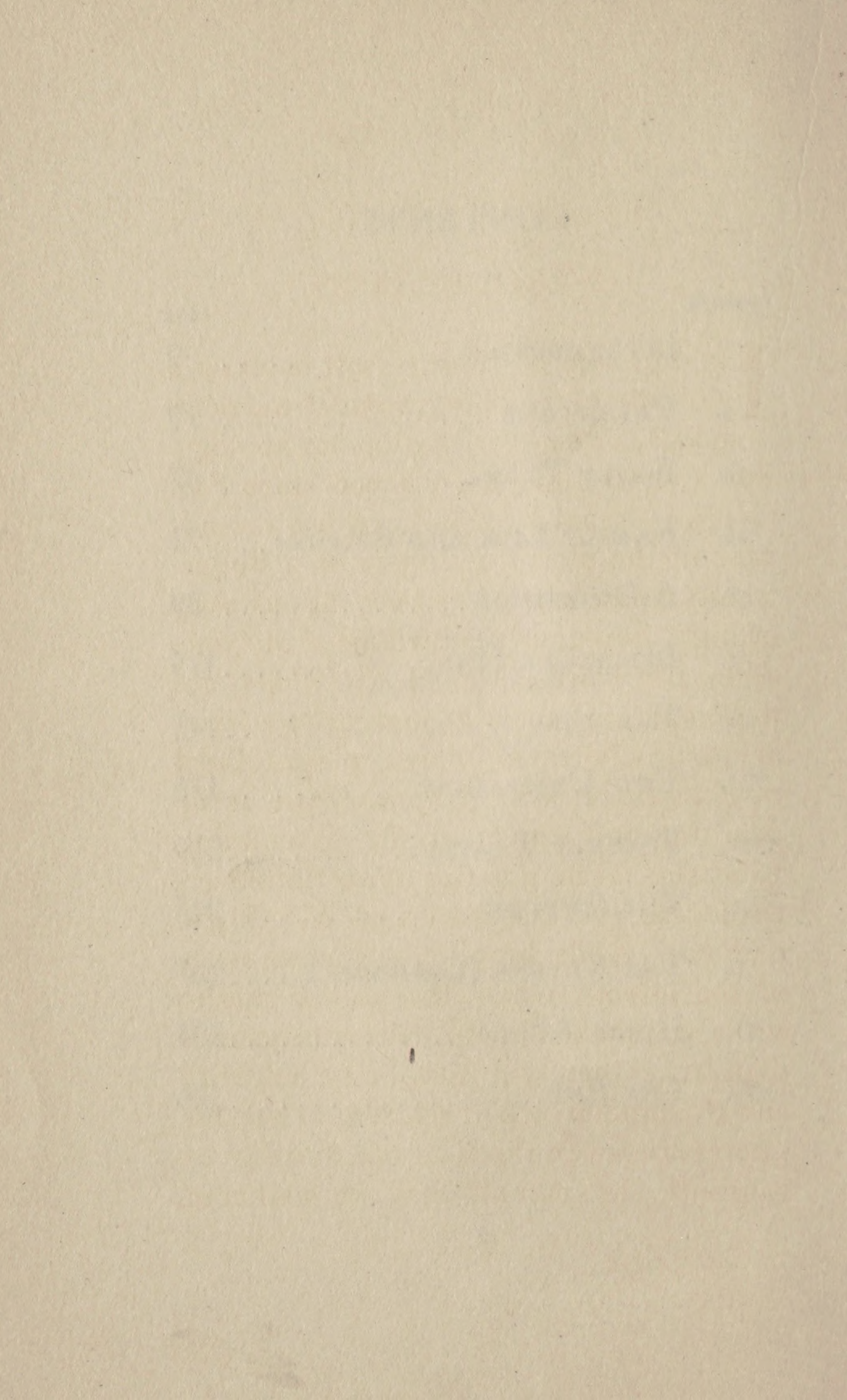
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INTRODUCTION

IN this age of literary self-analysis a volume of autobiographical memoirs needs neither explanation nor apology. But a short time has elapsed since Mr. George Bernard Shaw heralded the advent in the world of letters of a Super-tramp whose gift of prosody has already brought him a well-earned meed of fame. Soon afterwards, Mr. H. G. Wells, not to be outdone, acted as sponsor to a literary bath-chairman whose biographical revelations caused a temporary stir in the peaceful backwaters of the Circulating Libraries. The popular appreciation accorded to the discoveries of Mr. Shaw and Mr. Wells supplies adequate proof of the interest which the British public will always take in personal reminiscences that are written with simplicity, sincerity and a complete lack of reserve. That this interest is not confined to the writings of vagrants and casuals may be gathered

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from the continuous publication of those absorbing volumes of memoirs which it is the habit of modern ladies of title to compile in their leisure moments. It is not too much to hope that this fashion of self-revelation, which exposes the most intimate details of domestic life to the gaze of the public, may soon become universal.

The House of Lords has but recently been the centre of a controversy unique in its violence and bitterness. This may therefore be considered a singularly appropriate moment for the publication of an autobiography written by one who may be rightly regarded as a thoroughly typical member of that august and much maligned assembly. It was originally intended that this autobiography should be published anonymously. Indeed, Lord Bellinger was at one time anxious that its publication should be deferred until some time after his decease. He doubtless realised that his candid criticism of many of his nearest and dearest might prove unpalatable to thin-skinned or sensitive relations, and, being himself a man of an

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exceptionally tender heart, was naturally loth to hurt the feelings of his friends, at any rate during his own lifetime. Circumstances have, however, arisen which render it possible to publish the memoirs without further delay, and it is to be hoped that their appearance will cause but little pain to those of Lord Bellinger's acquaintance who may recognise their own portraits in these pages. (It may save trouble if I state that Mr. Bridgitt, of the firm of Bridgitt, Bridgitt and Venable, Lord Bellinger's family solicitors, has submitted the MS. to the consideration of a legal expert who has pronounced the satisfactory opinion that although certain passages might possibly be criticised as being in execrable taste, there is nothing libellous or actionable in the book.)

The winter of 1910 will always be notable as a period of intense and exceptional political stress. It culminated, as will no doubt be remembered, in a Constitutional crisis of unparalleled importance in the annals of English history. In November, we may recall, the House of Lords nobly

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responded to the demands of a clamorous Democracy. That passion for self-improvement which had been slumbering for so many centuries, almost unnoticed, in the bosoms of the Peerage, burst forth into sudden flame. Within the brief space of a single week the Lords, with a celerity which evoked the admiration and wonder of the whole civilized world, resolved upon the adoption of a number of the most drastic measures of internal reform, involving the sacrifice of that hereditary principle upon which their whole existence had so long depended. The sudden passionate desire to amend its constitution, displayed by the Upper Chamber during those momentous days of November, shamed even the bitterest opponents into silence, and it was universally admitted that men who were thus prepared to relinquish at a moment's notice all the rights and privileges for which their forefathers had bled and paid, for such countless generations, must be moved by no ordinary spirit of disinterested patriotism and self-sacrifice.

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It cannot, however, be denied that among the many Peers who were thus called upon to immolate themselves upon the altar of their Empire and their Party were a certain number of strenuous souls who viewed the idea of renouncing their legislative birthright with extreme reluctance. Of these perhaps the most prominent was Lord Bellinger. He was away hunting in Leicestershire when the news was brought to him of the surrender of that hereditary principle which he had always regarded as the salvation of England. He was not therefore able to take any personal part in the debate upon his leader's startling reformatory resolutions until a week later, when there was a hard frost. He did not remain idle, however, but spent nearly the whole of one Sunday morning composing a masterly letter to the *Morning Post* in which he explained at some length the danger that would threaten England and the Empire if men like himself were no longer qualified to take part in the deliberations of the Upper Chamber. "It will be a deplorable

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day for this country," he wrote, "when the possession of large estates, often held by the same family for two or more generations, shall no longer entitle land-owners to play the principal part in the government of these islands. It will be a sad day for the Empire when the aristocracy of birth and wealth shall cease to represent themselves in our Imperial Senate, and the composition of the Second Chamber is restricted to individuals whose only qualifications consist of some fortuitous intellectual eminence, or mere personal merit."

Lord Bellinger's protests, alas! fell upon deaf ears, and when he discovered that he himself could not hope to find a seat in any House of Lords constituted upon lines so narrow and democratic as those foreshadowed by the leaders of the so-called Reform Movement, he very rightly determined that his country should be punished for her ingratitude, and, after selling his English property and disposing of Bellinger House, Mayfair, bade farewell to the land which (as

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he bitterly declared) seemed to have no further use for his services.

Bellinger Hall became the property of Mr. Wilbur P. Balch, familiarly known in Chicago as the Chew-gum King, while Lord Bellinger's London residence was acquired by a Limited Entertainment Company which proposes to convert it into an Electric Palace and Skating Rink.

During his brief colonial tour, which he describes in these memoirs, Lord Bellinger had been greatly attracted by the climate and scenery of Western Canada. When therefore he decided to cut himself adrift of all his old associations he took steps to purchase a large tract of land in British Columbia, and, after shaking the dust of England off his feet, emigrated to Vancouver, at the commencement of this year, taking his wife and infant daughter with him. Before leaving he handed me a packet containing this autobiographical sketch, and informed me that I was at liberty to publish it whenever I felt disposed to do so. It had been completed some months before the occurrence of that

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Constitutional crisis which was the immediate cause of his emigration, and terminates therefore upon a suitably optimistic note.

My own share in the production of this work is of the slightest, but should perhaps be made clear. As was becoming in a man of his social position, Lord Bellinger enjoyed the privilege of a public-school education, and was afterwards brought up in a fashion suited to one destined from birth to undertake the responsibilities of hereditary statesmanship. He would therefore have been the last man in the world to claim the possession of any literary skill or pretend that he had anything but the most rudimentary acquaintance with the intricacies of grammar, style or punctuation. He was rightly content to leave such minor matters to less fortunate persons who, like myself, have been compelled by circumstances to study the laws of syntax and composition. As the editor of his memoirs it has been my pleasant duty to rewrite most of the original manuscript which the distinguished

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author had dictated somewhat hurriedly to his typewriter. And so, although the matter is invariably Lord Bellinger's, the manner is generally my own.

With these brief words of introduction my task comes to an end, and I will leave Lord Bellinger to tell his own story and trace the development of his own character by a simple portrayal of the numerous events of interest that have combined to form the groundwork of his successful career as a soldier and (until recently) a statesman.

H. G.

CHAPTER I

PARENTAGE

OF my lamented father, John Albert Bellinger, 1st Baron Bellinger, who figured for so many years in the forefront of English political and social life, it is not necessary for me to say very much. Lord Bellinger, as is well known, was the offspring of wealthy parents who belonged to that upper-middle class which forms the very backbone of the British Empire. His father, Sir Percy Bellinger, was a successful brewer, with a large and flourishing business at Maidstone and a country-seat in the immediate neighbourhood of that town. His mother, née Miss Elizabeth Berridge, was the daughter of an affluent Lancashire cotton-spinner. My grandparents were, as may therefore be imagined, simple, unpretentious people, and neither my father nor myself has ever been ashamed of the fact. By a wise

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combination of finances, however, they contrived to emerge from the caterpillar state of provincial respectability to which they were born, into the chrysalis condition of a county family, and finally took their places without question in the butterfly world of Mayfair.

For the first twenty years of their married life the Percy Bellingers lived in comparative obscurity at Bellinger Hall, Maidstone. Later on, when business improved to such an extent that my grandfather felt no qualms about accepting the honour of Knighthood which the Prime Minister repeatedly offered him, the family moved to London. They bought a small house on the sunny side of Queen's Gate, and entertained their friends lavishly but unostentatiously, with the aid of a plethoric but wellmeaning butler who breathed heavily on their heads when handing the wine, and not more than two (or at the outside three) footmen to minister to their needs.

Even when they moved to Grosvenor Square, my grandparents continued to

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maintain a rare and dignified simplicity, scarcely altering their mode of life in any but the smallest domestic particulars, such as buying a curled white wig for the coachman, engaging taller footmen with powdered hair and calves of greater girth, and having a larger crest embossed upon their carriages and harness.

They did not pretend to be any better than they were—honest, rich gentlefolk, with a right to wear court-dress and the assured privilege of admittance to the Royal Enclosure at Ascot; and the virtues of self-effacement and modesty formed by no means the least precious part of that inheritance which they bequeathed to their only son. Indeed, when Sir Percy died of apoplexy, the day after a Lord Mayor's Banquet, and his widow was fortunately persuaded to retire permanently to a cottage in the country, and left her son in sole possession of the house in Grosvenor Square and of Bellinger Hall, my father, John Albert Bellinger, was a simple, if extremely wealthy, commoner—a Justice of the Peace, certainly, and

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a Knight Harbinger of the Primrose League, but nothing more.

My dear father had for some years maintained an unavailing siege upon the heart of the Hon. Ermyntrude Blomyng (which, as everybody knows, is pronounced 'Bling'). On the demise of Sir Percy Bellinger, this charming lady at length realised the true worth of her importunate suitor, and accepted him, much against the wishes of her parents, Lord and Lady Bulkinghorne (pronounced Bolquhoun), proud old-fashioned aristocrats of a type that is fortunately becoming rare.

John Bellinger and his bride were married at St. John's, Knightsbridge, by the Bishop of Bray and seven minor dignitaries of the Church. The service was fully choral; the guests (numbering among others the Crown Princess of Herzegovina and the Servian Ambassador) were fashionable and select; the presents numerous and costly. A special detachment of police had to be employed to control the crowds of complete strangers who

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congested the approaches to the sacred edifice. There was, indeed, scarcely a dry eye in the gallery (filled with domestic servants in a condition bordering upon hysteria) when the choir sang "Fight the good fight!" while the register was being signed in the vestry by the happy couple's most affluent relatives and the Prime Minister of the day, who fortunately happened to be a distant connection of the bride's.

One daughter and three sons were the ultimate result of this alliance; Victoria, who died comparatively young, William Albert Edward, Hugo Claud, and, lastly, Richard de la Poer Tracy, my humble self.

From the moment of his marriage Fortune seemed to smile upon my father. With a strongminded and aristocratic wife, related (however distantly) to the Prime Minister, he might well consider himself safely started along the high road to success. He could indeed be certain of obtaining advancement in whatever direction he chose to turn his footsteps,

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and it merely remained for him to decide upon the particular career to which he should devote his wealth and talents.

For some time, however, it looked as though the name of Bellinger was not likely to be enrolled in the immortal annals of fame. During the first fifteen years of his married life my father took no very active part in public affairs. He was by nature inclined to be somewhat indolent, and would have been content to end his days as a country squire, or as the husband of one of "London's leading hostesses," as my mother was generally referred to in the Social columns of the Press. She, however, was an ambitious woman, as I have already explained, and had long ago decided that her husband should make an indelible mark upon the pages of his national history. It was to her, therefore, that he owed his final determination to shake off the natural lethargy which had long been his stumbling-block, and stand for Parliament. As a Candidate for Parliamentary honours my father was eminently successful, being

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elected member for the Kentish division of Paddlehurst by a large Conservative majority. Later on, when in his new capacity as legislator he proceeded to Westminster to take his place upon the green benches of the House of Commons, no one attended the debates with greater regularity than he. Nor did any leave the precincts of Parliament when the long day's work was over, with a more sublime consciousness of duty nobly done, and what his classical education once tempted him to refer to as a *mens sana in corpore vili*.

He asked for no reward. But even in this world, where injustice is so rampant and so universal; in this England of ours, where the fog veils the just and the unjust alike, true merit must always be sure of eventual if tardy recognition. It was so in the case of my father, and he was gratified but not altogether surprised to read, one fine morning, in the Queen's Birthday Honours List, that Her Majesty had been graciously pleased to confer upon him the dignity of a peerage of the United Kingdom.

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A month later, when he took his seat in the House of Lords, with all the customary ceremonial, as 1st Baron Bellinger, of Bellinger in the County of Kent, he was supported by two old college friends, Lord Pembridge (better known perhaps as the husband of Miss Elsie Toller of the Gaiety Theatre) and Lord Clanworth, the hero of the great Clanworth Divorce Case in which his cross-examination by Sir Simeon Tozer provided the readers of the Sunday newspapers with such excellent value for their money during a Lenten period peculiarly barren of incident.

My dear father was anything but a snob; quite the reverse. But it took him some weeks of constant practice to control the very natural emotion with which his bosom thrilled each time his butler called him "My Lord"; and the second coachman who addressed him incorrectly as "sir," twice in one morning, was very rightly given a month's wages and sent about his business without a character.

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Like his father before him, Lord Bellinger was a man of simple tastes. Save for renaming the family residence in Grosvenor Square "Bellinger House, Mayfair," he did not deem it necessary to effect any drastic alterations in his mode of life. He attended the debates in the Lords as faithfully as he had those in the Commons, would be in his place punctually at half past four every afternoon, and was one of the last to leave the Chamber, at a quarter to five, when the day's sitting came to an end. Thus for some time he continued his political career, conscientiously if silently, and, though he scarcely ever opened his lips in debate, was never known to miss a division. Such zeal could not altogether escape the notice of the party leaders, and it soon became evident that Lord Bellinger was a man deservedly marked out for promotion.

Opportunity makes the statesman, as has often been said, and my dear father's elevation to the House of Lords as Baron Bellinger was shortly followed by the offer of a Cabinet appointment. This he

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accepted with but little hesitation, for though at first inclined to depreciate his own capacity or experience, he was soon persuaded to recognise that neither was in any way necessary to success.

For many years, therefore, he sacrificed himself devotedly to the service of his country, and placed all his energies at the disposal of those who had the future of the British Isles at heart. Later on, when the Empire was in danger, when the cause of Right and Property was in need of support, when every landowner's pheasants were threatened by the ruthless hand of Socialism, and every brewer saw his profits disappearing beneath a wave of national temperance which the Government of the day seemed powerless to stem, the appearance of such a man as Lord Bellinger in the political arena did much to restore public confidence.

On the subject of my father's later political career there is little need to expatiate. May it not be studied at length in the immemorial chronicles of Hansard? Is it not writ large across the pages of English History?

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Lord Bellinger was not perhaps what people would call a clever man, in the narrow sense implied by that much mis-used expression. That is to say, he was not gifted with any peculiar qualities of intellect calculated to raise him above his fellows. As far as manners were concerned, however, it would have been impossible to find his equal throughout the entire British dominions.

Manners, as a great thinker once said, come before all morality; they are the perfect virtues. Without them a man may be a Senior Wrangler, blest with unusual powers of cerebral agility, and yet fail to make his mark in the world. With their assistance, he may lack the faintest gleams of intelligence, and yet live to become a Prime Minister, a Company Promoter, or even a permanent official at the War Office.

Tact, selfcontrol, what is technically known as "an eye to the main chance," often lead a man to giddier heights than does the mere possession of an abnormal supply of brain matter. Many an Eng-

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lish statesman in the past, gifted though he may have been with unusual oratorical powers, with quickness of perception and a genius for Departmental control, has failed to retain his Ministerial position through lack of the very qualities above mentioned. Many a dull, selfconfident individual, with a plausible manner and a general air of suavity and *savoir faire*, has fought his way to the throne of a Colonial Governor, to a seat on the Judicial Bench, to a high military Staff appointment or a Parliamentary Under-secretaryship, entirely owing to his regard for what are known as the niceties of private life.

My father was appointed Minister of Agriculture in Queen Victoria's Government at a time when he did not possess the most rudimentary knowledge upon such subjects as the rotation of crops or the proper treatment of glanders. He always remained in blissful ignorance of the difference between a mangle and a wurzel, and the habits of the silo were ever a mystery to him. Later on, when he became

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President of the Board of Education, his spelling was not his strongest point. Such words as "unparalleled," "Tuesday," "ipecacuanhar," etc., would have presented insurmountable difficulties to his otherwise facile pen, had not their occurrence in Blue-books been fortunately rare.

Lord Bellinger, in fact, owed his parliamentary successs almost entirely to his unfailing urbanity, to a strong sense of propriety, to the atmosphere of good breeding with which he had contrived to surround himself.

At the Board of Agriculture there were many officials who could discuss at great length the effect of the wire-worm upon hops; there was only one—and that one Lord Bellinger—who could tell (without consulting a book of reference) the relative precedence of a Viscount's younger son and the prospective heir to a Barony.

At the Education Department there were few of the junior clerks who had not solved to their own satisfaction the intricate problem of Denominational Relig-

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ious Teaching; there was none who at the daily luncheon interval could bring to the consumption of asparagus an air of such consummate grace as his chief. Their knowledge was limited, parochial, departmental; his was universal, cosmopolitan, *deportmental*, if one may coin the word. Small wonder then that Lord Bellinger was beloved and respected by the whole British public. He was a man who never shirked responsibilities; nor did he permit his official duties to devolve upon the shoulders of anybody else—except, of course, his private secretary. It was always his principle, however, to avoid interfering with the work of his subordinates. He allowed the permanent officials to run the department upon their own lines, merely keeping a tactful hand upon the machine, ready to deal with any emergency that might—but fortunately never did—arise.

He would sit in his office in Whitehall for hours at a time, reading the weekly illustrated papers, waiting for his secretaries to bring him the various documents

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to which it was necessary that his signature should be appended before the business of Empire could proceed, and never grudged the valuable time spent upon so thankless a task.

My illustrious father consequently became a very popular and prominent figure upon the political stage of Great Britain. And it was not until the English people had been startled into momentary surprise by the great Saltingborough Soap Scandal (as it was afterwards called), and learnt that Lord Bellinger was in some measure responsible for the very unfortunate state of affairs that existed in the Contract Department, that a revulsion of public feeling took place against this favourite Minister, and he was forced to resign office, bringing down the whole Government in his fall.

In that admirable monograph but lately contributed to the "EMPIRE BUILDERS" series by that prolific and brilliant writer, Mr. G. K. Blusterton, the public services of the first Lord Bellinger have been ably epitomised in a fascinating chapter from

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which it may be permitted to make the following extract:*

“Lord Bellinger was essentially a great man. And he was essentially a great man because he was essentially a small one. There is an idea abroad to the effect that a meticulous grasp of details is the sign of a petty and a narrow mind. Never did a more hopeless fallacy prevail. It is the large mind that is alone capable of appreciating the full importance of facts that are in themselves trivial, while some minor matter which by reason of its very insignificance eludes notice, is more often than not the very nucleus and hub around which the most vital issues revolve. For, after all, the trifling things are of much greater importance than are the vast, tragic, elemental affairs which loom so disproportionately large on the mental horizon. The choice of a wife has to be made but once or twice in a lifetime; the choice of a breakfast-dish is a matter of daily recurrence. Courage, self-control and purity are very noble

*EMPIRE BUILDERS. No. XLIV. LORD BELLINGER. (Greenwood, Spink, Hawtrey and Neuman. London and Hastings. 7/6 net.)

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and very necessary; but there are many things as noble and even more necessary—bread, and beer, and a mackintosh cape. The sacred heat of the passion that flames in the heart of a lover is beyond human control; but the fire in one's bedroom needs hourly tending. The tragedy of ten thousand Chinamen who are swallowed up in an earthquake evokes our deepest sympathy; but we cannot conscientiously pretend to compare our personal sorrow on such an occasion with the more poignant grief that we experience over the loss of a favourite umbrella. . . . It has been said of Lord Bellinger that he was not ambitious; that, having been induced by the force of public opinion to resign his Cabinet appointment at a period of great national stress, he modestly elected to retire into the comparative obscurity of private life, rather than battle with the adverse tide of circumstance. Who knows but that this very instinct of self-effacement was an expression of that soaring ambition which ever remained, as I maintain, one of the leading characteris-

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tics of his nature? What is ambition? Is there no element of ambition in the statesman's desire to shine within the circle of his own family, to illumine the dark corners of his own domestic hearth, to dazzle his own butler with the epigrams that have long gained applause upon the political platform? Is the ambition of a pawnbroker to become a peer more dignified, more admirable, than that of a peer who yearns to become an honest pawnbroker? The ambition to renounce is no less praiseworthy than the ambition to succeed; its rewards are no less hard-won. To triumph is undoubtedly a glorious thing, like the dawn, or a good square meal. But to fail, as thoroughly as Lord Bellinger failed, resolutely, with fearless, open eyes, may be as glorious a thing, and even more blessed. For failure lies at the root of all success, and in the very heart of success the worm of failure builds its nest. . . . It has been said, again, that Lord Bellinger was a man of complex character. If he was tortuous, it was the very simplicity of his nature that made him

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so. For in this world we find complexity in the very simplest of created things, and the homely but mysterious sausage stands for all time as the perfect type of our complicated human nature." . . .

After his political *débâcle* Lord Belinger retired into the country, and devoted the evening of his life to the science of apiculture. He was much interested in the breeding of honey-bees, and, being of a somewhat careful disposition, was accused by a waggish friend of crossing his bees with glow-worms, in order to enable the industrious little creatures to work by night as well as day. I should like, however, to take this opportunity of stating that there is not a word of truth in such an accusation. His book, "Bees; Their Treatment in Sickness and in Health," would doubtless have become the recognised handbook on the subject, had not some busybody discovered that the greater part of it was borrowed word for word (but without acknowledgment) from a volume published in 1845 by the French naturalist Génieu. This discovery caused

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my father so much annoyance that he angrily withdrew his book from circulation and wrote an extremely ingenious if not very convincing letter to *The Times* in defence of unconscious plagiarism.

If Lord Bellinger was destined to disappointment in his career as an administrative politician and as an author (or translator), in his family life he was fated to be no less unfortunate. His two eldest sons were a source of profound anxiety to him.

My eldest brother, William Bellinger, had always been a strange creature, very bad at games, and inclined to read serious books when he should have been healthily employed shooting rabbits. At the age of five-and-twenty he became afflicted with acute religious mania, and insisted upon what he called "entering the Church." In vain did my father point out to him that he had "entered the Church" many years ago, when his godparents had surrounded the font at St. Peter's and undertaken on his behalf (but without consulting him) a number

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of serious pledges by which he was afterwards to be considered permanently bound. The silvergilt mug and the combined knife-fork-and-spoon with which Sir Claud Ventriform and Lady Maud Holdenham, the two chief sponsors, had commemorated this sacred occasion, long survived in the plate-chest at Bellinger Hall as outward and visible signs of this solemn event.

My father could not be expected to view without misgiving his eldest son's decision to take Holy Orders. Lord Bellinger was not in any way prejudiced against the clergy, for whom he always entertained the greatest admiration. They were in his opinion, a most worthy body of men, and how we should get along without them on Sunday, as he was never tired of saying, he really didn't know. He invariably asked the Vicar of the parish to dine with him once a year, without his wife, and a certain number of the local clergy were always invited to Bellinger Hall on the occasion of the annual village schooltreat, when the four footmen

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already had as much work as they could manage.

But the idea of a Bellinger, and especially of the heir to the title, joining the priesthood was quite out of the question, and when William attempted to entangle my father in a theological discussion on the subject, the latter was very properly shocked. He had often been a good deal scandalised by his son's outspokenness on the subject of a personal Providence, having been brought up to deem it in the worst possible taste to mention the Deity at all—except, of course, on Sundays—and William's familiarity with such matters offended him deeply.

Lord Bellinger was an earnest churchman—that is to say he attended divine service regularly every Sunday, twice if in London, once in the country—but he rightly considered religion to be too sacred a thing for discussion on weekdays or by mere laymen. In fact, if he had had his way, the subject would never have been discussed at all by anybody, but would have been allowed to remain a sub-

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lime and noble mystery, to which one could turn for comfort in times of stress, when everything else had failed.

In vain, however, was my brother William implored to be sensible and go into the Guards. In vain was it pointed out to him that the position of a country curate was an undignified one for the future Lord Bellinger to adopt, and that the salary was quite disproportionate to the work. William stubbornly declined to listen to arguments or entreaties. He had received a "call," as he considered, and even my dear mother's remark that he could not have been taking his tonic regularly or he would never have experienced anything so unhealthy, produced no change in his views.

What was the result of William's obstinacy? For ten years my misguided brother laboured in one of the very poorest parishes of East Ham, living a hand-to-mouth existence—for though Lord Bellinger was only too anxious to help him financially, principle naturally forbade his doing so—always on the verge

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of bankruptcy, spending all his private means on the local charitable institutions which, despite his efforts, were never out of debt.

At length, when his health gave way, and he was ordered abroad, William elected to go as a missionary to Central China, where, it may be remarked, his services were not in any way required. He selected China as the field of his missionary effort, the problem of that country's conversion having always appealed alike to English hearts and pockets. Enlightened Londoners shudder at the thought of Chinese heathendom; it cuts our merchant princes to the quick to contemplate the odious Opium Traffic from which the British Empire reaps so vast a revenue. We are naturally a tender-hearted people, and cannot bear the thought of our neighbours jeopardising their prospects of future happiness by holding beliefs which we know little about and have neither the time nor the inclination to study.

In China William married the daugh-

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ter of a British vice-consul named Atkins, and devoted himself heart and soul to the task of proselytising the benighted heathen. His efforts were not altogether unsuccessful. After eight and a half years' hard missionary work, he contrived to induce three small native children to forsake the gods which their ancestors had worshipped for many centuries with comparatively harmless results, and perverted a few venal coolies from the religion in which they had been brought up by pious parents.

Finally, during one of the earlier Boxer risings, William was captured and put to death by those of his potential parishioners who were as fanatical on the subject of their faith as he was on his. He died a painful but glorious death by decapitation, with his last breath reciting snatches from his favorite "Hymns for Those of Riper Years at Sea." His loss was universally mourned. He had been lovely and pleasant in his life, as his epitaph declared, but in his death he was undoubtedly divided. This, as Mr. Bernard

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Shaw would have said, and as Lord Bellinger could not help affirming, was a heavy price to pay for the privilege of buttoning one's collar at the back instead of in front.

William being a clergyman, it might well have been assumed that the continuance of the title was secured. His wife, however, insisted upon presenting him with a monotonous sequence of daughters, though it was evident that her conduct was eminently distasteful to him, and Lord Bellinger himself had spoken to her very seriously more than once upon the subject. His daughter-in-law's failure to do her duty by the family was, indeed, one of the things my dear father could never forgive. After William's death she was never admitted to the family circle, though an allowance of eighty pounds a year was generously made to her (by my mother, who was always inclined to be softhearted), on condition that she and her seven daughters resided permanently abroad.

The case of Hugo Bellinger, my only remaining brother, was but a trifle

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less deplorable than that of poor William. Hugo figured for so many years and with such embarrassing frequency and prominence in the more interesting portion of those columns of the press which are devoted to the decisions of the Admiralty and Divorce Courts, that even when he settled down into comparative respectability with his third (or fourth) wife at Monte Carlo, he cannot be said to have added very largely to the family reputation.

During the latter part of his life, Hugo eked out a precarious existence in the Sunny South, shooting one kind of pigeon and plucking another. He was not, indeed, without talent. Persons who played cards with him declared that he had altogether mistaken his profession; he should have been a conjuror. They could not withhold their admiration of his methods, but seldom offered (or even consented) to play with him again.

Having given this brief outline of the lives and characters of my two elder brothers I may perhaps say, without un-

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duly boasting, that I was the only male member of my father's family who never caused him a moment's uneasiness. It is not therefore to be wondered at that he should always have bestowed upon me a measure of that affection and confidence which he denied to his elder sons, but of which I trust I have not proved myself altogether unworthy. On this point, however, I am perfectly content to allow posterity to judge, and it is with this object in view that I propose to supply my descendants with the autobiographical memoirs of a not altogether uneventful life.

CHAPTER II.

EARLY YEARS.

OF my infancy and childhood it is unnecessary to write at length. My life in the nursery closely resembled that of any other normal child of good family. My parents, kindly oldfashioned people, as I have explained, brought me up in the good oldfashioned manner. I was taught that children should be "seen but not heard," that I must efface myself whenever my elders were present, must never display the natural curiosity of youth by asking intelligent questions, nor develop my critical faculties by making personal remarks. I was bidden to sit quiet and silent at meals, to ask for mutton when my whole soul longed for chicken, for tapioca pudding (with lumps in it) when I yearned for apple-tart. I was repeatedly assured that Virtue is its own reward, and was mercifully left to discover by experience what sort of a reward that is.

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My mother was a very orthodox and devout woman, and read herself to sleep regularly every night with a chapter from the Old Testament. My father, as I have said, made a point of attending church every Sunday, both as an example to the weaker brethren—among whom he included the servants—and as a protest against that lack of Sabbath observance which is the growing tendency of an irreligious age. It is always a delightful sight, as some philanthropist once pointed out, to watch the British citizen in his front pew, singing

“Were the whole realm of Nature mine,
That were an offering far too small!”

while he fumbles in his pocket for the threepenny-bit with which he intends to encourage the propagation of the Gospel in foreign parts. It is always pleasant to hear him declare in a loud and unctuous voice that

“Whatever, Lord, we lend to thee
Repaid a thousandfold shall be,”

while making a mental calculation by

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which he becomes in anticipation the possessor of some £12.10.0 in heavenly currency.

Lord Bellinger was most particular in the exercise of his religious duties, and frequently provided his fellows with this admirable spectacle. In the home circle, too, my father's devotion was no less marked. He said "grace" himself in excellent Latin (unless a clergyman happened to be present) both before and after every meal. For some ceremonial reason or other, however, the grace that concluded the evening dinner always preceded dessert—it being apparently considered that there was little necessity for expressing thankfulness for oranges, grapes and bananas. Personally speaking, the after-dinner glass of port, the cigarette, coffee and liqueur, have always seemed to me to be the pleasantest incidents of the meal, and the most evocative of gratitude. But I may be wrong.

Family Prayers were an important part of the daily routine of the Bellinger household. Punctually at nine o'clock

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each morning the servants trooped into the dining-room, led by the junior scullery-maid—the van being brought up by the butler—and took their places upon two rows of chairs facing one another. The sexes were sternly divided, the men sitting on one side of the room, the women on the other, while Lady Bellinger and we children occupied a commanding position by the fireplace, and the master of the house officiated at one end of the dining-room table. The service was brief, but appropriate, consisting of the lesson for the day, a psalm (intoned in alternate verses by my father and his congregation) and a few prayers.

As a child the procedure of the household during family prayers puzzled almost as much as it interested me. I would gaze in admiration at the stout old butler when that worthy, in a stentorian voice which could be heard far above the shrill treble of the second-housemaid, proclaimed himself to be a sparrow on the housetop and a pelican in the wilderness. I found it very hard at first to be-

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lieve Mrs. Potts, the robust housekeeper, when that good lady remarked that she could "tell all her bones," and was much alarmed on another occasion at hearing the family coachman state without any apparent emotion that all his were out of joint. Finally, when at a preconcerted signal, the whole household fell upon its knees, exposing heavenwards a row of backs of every conceivable shape, I thought it odd that any request to Providence should be rendered more effective by being addressed to the seats of the dining-room chairs.

During the latter part of his life my dear father sometimes sacrificed his strict Sabbatarian views, and, in accordance with the wishes of his family, escorted us to afternoon concerts at the Queen's Hall. Here, after a copious luncheon, he would evince his interest in classical music by snoring contrapuntally throughout the entire performance of Tchaikowski's "1812," awaking with a loud exclamation of terror when the realistic bombardment by the orchestra's in-

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struments of percussion precluded any further idea of slumber.

I was thus brought up in an atmosphere of sincere Christianity, and my religious education was never in any danger of being neglected. My mother had given me, one Christmas, an illuminated text to hang over the nursery mantelpiece. This stated in florid letters of blue and gold that Providence was "an Uninvited Guest at Every Meal, an Unseen Listener to Every Conversation." Until I grew accustomed to this terrible idea, and realised that one should never believe half of what one reads in texts, this caused me much mental discomfort, adding a fresh terror to meals and making conversation almost impossible.

The unavoidable presence of the Deity was, indeed, so firmly impressed upon my childish mind that I would sometimes lie awake half the night trembling in terror. Providence was always held up to me as a sort of beneficent bogey, invested with every human attribute (except, of course, a sense of humour), suffering from an al-

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most morbid curiosity as to the doings of at least one little boy, and ever—as I put it, without any intentional disrespect—“about my bath and about my bed, and spying out all my ways.”

My unnatural flippancy, as my parents deemed it, caused the family much needless anxiety, as I now remember with sorrow. When I read the account of the fiery serpents with which the Israelites were punished for worshipping a golden calf, I could not conceal my surprise that Providence should have taken the offence so seriously. “Anybody else would have laughed,” I remarked to my much scandalised mother.

My childhood was in many ways a bright one, but, like other children, I had my moments of unhappiness. My father was not a badtempered man, though at times, especially during those years in which he held high office, inclined to be a trifle irritable. On several occasions he displayed towards his family in general and myself in particular some symptoms of that nerve-tension which

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was the result of many anxious hours spent in a Department of State. One especial instance stamped itself indelibly upon my callow memory. At the age of seven I was sitting on the nursery floor, I remember, persistently beating a drum which some tactless relative had given me on my birthday. My father's study was situated exactly below the nursery, and he was at that very moment endeavouring to compose a thoughtful article for the *Nineteenth Century* on "The Better Treatment of the Halfwitted," a subject upon which he was supposed to have expert knowledge. The constant repercussion of my tireless instrument eventually drove my father into a condition of mind bordering upon that of the unfortunates on whose behalf he was advancing so noble a plea for justice. He threw aside his unfinished essay, rushed upstairs, entered the nursery with great violence, and proceeded to puncture my drum in several places with the toe of his boot. At the same time he made use of expressions which I was too young to appreciate, but

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which nevertheless caused my mother to exclaim "Oh! John! Not before the child!" My father then left the room without further comment, and sent for the house-carpenter to release my mother and myself by replacing the nursery door-handle which he had accidentally carried away in his hand.

Again, when I was only ten years old, and my father took away the Shetland pony he had presented to me at Christmas, because he rightly considered that the animal might be better employed in mowing the tennis lawn, I incurred his just wrath by questioning the parental authority to confiscate what I was so misguided as to term *my* property. Such family quarrels were, however, rare, and the harmony of the home circle was seldom disturbed by wrangles or differences of opinion.

I was not, I fancy, a stupid child. At an early age I had mastered the intricacies of an instructional work euphemistically entitled "Reading Without Tears." Over this volume my mother and I used

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to weep together in lugubrious unison, while doubtless gathering much valuable information on such subjects as the presence of the Cat on the Mat in a Hat, or of a Hen in a Den with a Pen. My subsequent studies in the schoolroom grounded me upon a firm basis of elementary knowledge, having French and Latin for its foundation. Mademoiselle Alloncourt, my governess, was an accomplished lady of Swiss extraction. Though closely related to the Vicomte de Finesherbes, she had been compelled by circumstances to adopt teaching as a means of livelihood, and continued for many years a member of the Bellinger household. Here she was treated more as one of the family than as an inferior—except, of course, by the servants—and afterwards (through the kindness of my mother) became a permanent inmate of the Home for Inebriate Gentlewomen at Hythe. Under her kindly tuition I made rapid strides in French grammar and conversation. With her assistance I accompanied Ollendorf in his patient and indefatigable research after

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pens, ink and paper, and shared that author's passionate anxiety to discover the exact whereabouts of the Gardener's Mother, the Baker's Aunt, and the equally elusive relatives of numerous other tradesmen.

At the age of nine I was sent to school at Dr. Busby's Academy for Backward Boys at Broadmoor, where a supply of plain coarse food was supplemented by the bracing ozone of a London suburb. The inmates of this seminary enjoyed a beautiful view of Broadmoor Convict Prison and the local Criminal Lunatic Asylum from their dormitory windows, and could hear the bell tolling in Brookwood cemetery while they were at play.

Amid such cheerful surroundings I grew up strong and healthy.

Four years later I went to Eton, and took my place with the "heirs of all the ages"—and the heirs to most of the peerages—in that famous institution which has long been rightly regarded as the most perfect training-ground for those who will presently be called upon to

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undertake the responsibilities of a life of leisure.

The young Englishman of my day was not sent to Eton to learn how to keep his accounts; he could not expect to be taught to carry on a business correspondence, nor indeed to write an intelligible letter to his family. He was not told anything of the time-honoured traditions of his Fatherland, nor the history of his own national literature. But there are more important things than a knowledge of English or European history, there are lessons more vital to a young man's welfare than those which merely ensure that he shall spell his mother-tongue correctly, and enjoin him not to too frequently split his infinitives. At a public school I learnt to be a man of the world; I was taught to be a gentleman; I laid the foundations of successful life as a country squire, and above all a sportsman.

Eton also provided me with a classical education which was of the greatest possible service in later life.

My tutor, the worthy Mr. Murton, better known subsequently as that exquisite

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stylist whose numerous volumes of essays—"Deep Waters," "Monthly Musings," "The Long Road," etc.—suggest that he has turned on some literary tap and is unable to turn it off again, taught me the rudiments of Latin and Greek, and I have always looked back with gratitude to these early lessons which I was afterwards destined to find of such inestimable value. When I joined the army I would often entertain my brother officers by reciting to them, after "mess," that long list of Latin prepositions which govern the subjunctive—*a, ab, absque, coram, dam*, etc.—and there was scarcely a man in the Household Brigade who could conjugate the Greek verb *τυπτω* so correctly as I.

At Eton I was trained to recite many of the Odes of Horace from memory in a plaintive nasal monotone; my mind was richly stored with Bowdlerised selections from the least amorous portions of Ovid's verse. My brain became a treasure-house of classic lore. I learnt all that there was to be known about the Roman she-wolf who (as my mother once remarked, with

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an apology for referring to anything so indelicate) was famous for nursing Romeo and Juliet, and whose timely barking saved the Roman Capitol. I had at my fingers' ends the story of how Marius was foolish enough to leap fully-armed into a crevasse, how Cincinnatus put his hand to the plough and never looked back, and so on. In these and kindred subjects I was well versed. I even acquired some facility in the art of turning charming English lyrics into indifferent Greek iambics, and could give a literal translation of the *Iliad* which doubtless made Homer and Pope revolve in their respective graves. Arithmetic was my particular *forte*, and at an early age I had acquired a sufficient knowledge of mathematics to enable me to add up a bridge-score correctly. I also knew most of the first book of Euclid by heart, and was able to explain to admiring friends that the whole of anything was greater than half of it, and that things that were equal to one another were equal to themselves. This kind of knowledge always comes in

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useful, and I had little cause to regret the fact that it was not until many years after leaving Eton that I discovered the beauties of English literature which had been so carefully concealed from my gaze during the impressionable period of my non-age.

At a public school I also imbibed that spirit of patriotism which makes the English what they are—if, indeed, they need any excuse of this sort. The pure French accent of Zurich, which I had absorbed from Mademoiselle Alloncourt in the nursery, gave place to a sturdier British breadth of tone. I soon realised that among Englishmen an accurate knowledge of any foreign language is considered a distinctly effeminate accomplishment—did not Bismarck declare that all Englishmen who speak French correctly are, with one exception, scoundrels?—and as I had no desire that other little boys should kick my shins and call me a muff, hastened to acquire the habit of talking French with an insular emphasis which left no doubt as to my nationality.

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The other and most important lessons which I learnt at a public school were taught me out of school hours. In my lengthy intervals of leisure I was instructed to "play the game," to pity foreigners, to despise the Liberal Government, and to be polite to all those who were older than myself, or bigger.

There was, however, one lesson which Eton could not teach me. This was the necessity of cultivating the society of those whom Providence had especially blessed in the matter of birth or wealth. Eton boys are, of course, bad judges of character. They take a friend as they find him, without troubling to ask themselves whether he is fitted by birth or fortune to be included in the sacred circle of friendship. I remember, for instance, making great friends with a boy named Gregson *minor*, the youngest of the thirteen sons of Canon Gregson, an impecunious provincial divine. This impetuous act was fraught with disagreeable consequences, which I was no doubt too young to foresee. The Reverend Canon caused

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much annoyance to my father by presuming upon his son's friendship for myself to request the loan of Bellinger House, Mayfair, for a missionary meeting. He even went so far as to solicit a subscription towards funds for lighting and heating his parish church, and for providing poor children with country holidays—for supplying, in fact, hot air for his congregation and fresh air for their families. This considerably irritated Lord Bellinger, who had long been forced to cut off all contributions to charity, not for reasons of economy but as a protest which he felt it to be his duty as a man of principle to make against a recent increase in the Income Tax.

Again, I remember resolutely withholding my friendship from a youth called Cowan, whom indeed I used to kick regularly every morning, on the plea that the boy was a liar and invariably omitted to wash himself. Many years afterwards I happened to meet my former schoolfellow in the train, and was surprised to find in my companion no

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less a personage than the son of Sir Simeon Cowan, senior partner of the great firm of Cowan, Eickstein and Co. of Birmingham. As the head of this company of wellknown small-arm manufacturers, who supply rifles and ammunition to nearly all the savage tribes with whom England is from time to time engaged in guerilla warfare, Sir Simeon is a man of some importance, and worth about a million and a quarter. His son and heir was not therefore a person whom it was safe to ignore, much less to kick. All this, however, is by the way.

It must not be imagined that my early life was altogether untouched by sadness. I have determined not to dwell more than is absolutely necessary in these pages upon the tragic side of things, and will devote but little space to the first real sorrow that came to mar the peace of my home life.

When I was about sixteen years old my little sister Victoria was suddenly stricken down by a severe illness from which she never really recovered. Being an only

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daughter she was cherished by her parents with a very deep devotion, and this unexpected seizure came as a great shock to us all. Though I was eight years her senior, I had always loved Victoria very dearly, and was her favourite brother; my anxiety was consequently as deep as that of any of the family. This was my first experience of sorrow, and made a profound impression on my youthful mind.

Victoria's illness gradually gave way to treatment, as the doctors said, but was succeeded by many years of convalescence which made it necessary for her to live entirely abroad. How well I remember the day she left England with her governess, Miss Purcell! What a terrible farewell scene we had at the station, when my mother broke down and even my father blew his nose with unusual frequency and resonance. Victoria had possessed a little black spaniel, "Prince" by name, and after she had gone away he used to wander about the deserted nursery seeking his mistress in a most dis-

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consolate fashion. He eventually attached himself to me, and I was glad to have the opportunity of proving my love for Victoria by taking every care of her little pet.

On the day of her departure, when we all returned to Bellinger from the station, I felt that I could no longer restrain those tears which in my boyish heart I deemed unmanly. I hastened upstairs to my bedroom and locked myself in. "*Partir c'est mourir un peu*," as I was then for the first time to discover. Overcome by emotion, I flung myself down upon the bed and buried my face in my hands.

"Prince" had followed me upstairs. On reaching the bedroom he hurried across as usual to the water-jug and slaked his thirst. He then looked around to see what I was doing, was (I suppose) astonished to find me lying motionless on the bed, and decided that steps must at once be taken to rouse me from this incomprehensible position. He probably remembered the curious fondness of human beings for throwing sticks and stones

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about and then expecting their four-legged friends to retrieve them. By some strange oversight, however, there was neither stick nor stone to be found in my bedroom. At length a brilliant inspiration occurred to him. Selecting a small piece of coal from the scuttle in the fender, he carried it to my bedside, laid it carefully on the floor, and began jumping about all round it like a Jack-in-the-Box, dumbly inviting me to try and take it from him. I was not in a mood for play, and remained motionless. After this failure "Prince" seemed to realise that more strenuous measures must be adopted to attract my attention. The bed was for him a forbidden place, as he knew well. This was no time, however, for slavish obedience to convention, and, taking his courage in both paws, he leapt lightly up onto the counterpane by my side, and awaited results. It was doubtless a pleasant surprise not to be ordered off peremptorily, and, much encouraged, he snuggled up close to me, as though desirous of seeing my face and learning my

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trouble. When he had with difficulty wormed his way within a few inches of my pillow, he suddenly felt two large rain-drops descend upon his little damp nose. On licking these off he found them to be warm and salt, and realised that something must indeed be wrong. With feverish paws he scratched away the hands that hid my face, and began to kiss my nose and chin with impartial devotion. For some time I took no notice, and then all of a sudden the thought of this warm little friend trying to comfort me stirred something in my heart, and I seized him in my arms and squeezed him so tightly to my breast that he would probably have squeaked had he not understood that this was not the moment for squeaking. The weight of my sorrow seemed to grow lighter from that instant, and I was able to appear at luncheon with the rest of the family.

Poor little "Prince!" I am sure he understood all that was passing in my mind that day, and though at the time his efforts at consolation only made my tears

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flow faster, his silent sympathy was of very real comfort to me. He died a year or two later—of over-eating, I fear—and was succeeded, first by “Pacchiarotto,” a pug who succumbed to distemper, and then by “Bramble,” a little Aberdeen terrier whose indoor manners left so much to be desired that I eventually gave him to my mother.

Years have passed since then, but to this day, whenever I am asked to subscribe to some society for the promotion of scientific research by means of experiments upon live animals, the thought of “Prince” seeking to share my childish sorrow holds me back.

Three years later, at the age of nineteen, I bade farewell to Eton, and to some extent began to realise the serious responsibilities of life. My father, like so many other patriotic Englishmen, had always destined his youngest son for the army, and I was fully determined to carve out a great career for myself with the sword. I failed, however, to pass the necessary examination on three successive occa-

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sions, but finally, after spending some years at a crammer's establishment in Norfolk, qualified (by service in the Militia) for a commission in Her Majesty's army. Before I reached my twenty-third birthday, therefore, I was taking my place on the barracksquare and in London society as a fullfledged ensign of the Guards, and it is from this moment that I date the commencement of my real life.

CHAPTER III.

FAMILY LIFE AND FRIENDS.

LIKE my father Lord Bellinger, I was naturally disinclined to anything approaching effort, but never at any period of my life could I have been accused of being a loafer. On attaining manhood the temptation to lead a life of idleness was often strong, but I suppressed it with a firm hand. For nearly twelve years I served in a regiment of Footguards, performing my military duties cheerfully, and I hope thoroughly, during the whole period of my service.

Military life in those days was not so irksome and laborious as it has since become; the army had not yet degenerated into a profession, but was still looked upon as a pleasant temporary refuge for young men of good family, like myself, upon whose hands the time hung somewhat heavily. Even so, the strict discipline attaching to barrack life was occa-

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sionally tiresome to a man of independent nature, but I can truthfully boast that during the whole term of my soldiering I scarcely ever uttered a complaint. If I grumbled at all it was with good reason and in accordance with the best traditions of the service. While actually "doing duty" (as it was called) I would often rise as early as 8 a.m., and my day's work was seldom over before breakfast—sometimes not until ten or eleven o'clock in the morning. Nor did I ever get more than eight (or at the outside nine) months' leave in the year. In spite of this, however, I must confess that no period of my existence was pleasanter than that which I spent upon the barracksquare, and I always look back with feelings of delight and gratitude to those happy years of soldiering.

At this time I lived at home, at Bellinger House, with my family, going to and from my work every day in one of my father's broughams. On fine summer mornings, when the labours of the day were accomplished, I should sometimes

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have preferred to return from barracks to Grosvenor Square on foot. It was, however, obviously impossible for an English officer to be seen walking in uniform in a West-end street after breakfast without evoking the unwelcome curiosity if not the actual ridicule of the passer-by, and I was forced to relinquish the idea.

During my term of military service I made many excellent friends, and always found the company of my brother-officers congenial and agreeable. Perhaps the comrade whose society I most valued at this time was Herbert Hazelton, generally known as "Ginger," who afterwards distinguished himself in the South African War, and finally, on the death of his uncle, Lord Garlick, succeeded to the title.

When we first became acquainted Hazelton was a young man of my own age, about three or four and twenty, clean-shaven and pleasant-looking, with rather long fair hair which he swept back from his brow, and a good figure. He was in many ways a most versatile and accom-

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plished person. No one could make an apple-pie bed or balance a sponge upon a door better than he; his imitations of celebrated actors were most amusing and could often be recognised at once; and the juggling tricks which he performed at mealtimes with the aid of a fork and two oranges were as graceful as they were entertaining. He was, in fact, the *beau ideal* of a soldier, and, taking him all round, a man whose society well repaid cultivation. Perhaps his *forte* was the singing of comic songs. These he rendered in so exquisitely humorous a manner that people who were playing bridge in the next room would often stop in the middle of an exciting spade hand to declare that they couldn't remember a single card that had been played while that noise was going on. Unlike so many amateurs who accompany themselves upon the piano, Hazelton never gave one the impression of being so busy playing that he couldn't sing, or so busy singing that he couldn't play. His repertoire was varied and extensive, ranging from what he

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called "Boudoir Ballads" such as "Step lightly, there's crape upon the door!" or "Don't throw the lighted lamp at Mother!" to more obviously comic songs relating chiefly to the dubious humours of connubial infelicity, intoxication and the disadvantage of possessing a red nose or a mother-in-law. Of these my favourite perhaps were "Her sweetheart had been in the sun," "Father's in the pig-stye; you can tell him by his hat," and "He was really more a monkey than a friend." My dear mother was always very fond of the latter, and would beg Hazelton to sing it whenever he came to call.

I used often to bring my friend home to dine quietly with my family, and he soon became one of the intimates of Belling House. How well I remember the simple domestic scenes in which he so frequently took part, when we all assembled in the drawing-room after dinner! My father would be reading—a blue-book very probably—in his armchair by the fire; my two brothers—William had not yet become religious, nor Hugo irre-

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ligious—and myself occupied the sofa near the piano, ready to join in any chorus at a moment's notice; while my sainted mother played "Demon" patience in another corner of the room. The refrain of one of Hazelton's songs still sticks in my memory:

"He ain't dead yet, but he hasn't got long
to live,
There's a lump as big as a brick be-
hind his ear,
If I grow to be a hundred I never can
forgive
The man who put his whiskers in my
beer!"

I have only to close my eyes even now to hear Hazelton singing this to us, and to recall the faint flute-like tones in which my dear mother declared that she *never* could forgive the man who put his whiskers in her beer.

We were a very musical family, and often spent the hours between tea and dinner singing those old-world glees and part-songs which are very rarely heard to-day, save perhaps in suburban homes.

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The fashion for such songs has long ago died out, but in my young days much harmless amusement was to be derived from so simple a source. My eldest brother William had a fine tenor voice (which he afterwards ruined in the pulpit); Hugo provided a fairly creditable baritone (which he subsequently drowned); I sang bass; and when Hazelton happened to be of the party he would obligingly take the soprano parts in a high falsetto which made up in volume what it lacked in tone. The result of our combined efforts caused us a great deal of pleasure, and, though it may have been painful to the listener, my mother seldom if ever complained.

“O, who will o’er the downs so free!” and “Oh, Hush thee, my baby!” were our favourites, though occasionally we would soar higher and attempt some old-world part-song of Elizabethan date. It is strange how fragments of ancient ballads cling to the memory long after the power or the wish to sing them has ceased to exist. I can still remember bits of an old

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glee we used to sing together with remarkable success in those early days of which I speak. It went somehow as follows, unless my memory is at fault:

Hazelton (falsetto): "Have you sipped the bag of the bee?"

Myself (basso profundo): "Have you felt the wool of the beaver?"

William (not to be outdone): "Or swan's down ever?"

Tutti: "Oh, so soft, oh, so fair, oh so sweet is she!"

Hazelton: Oh, so soft!

Hugo: Oh, so fair!

Myself: Oh, so sweet!

Tutti: Is she—hee-hee!

etc., etc.

(After singing this song, I remember Hazelton justly remarking that he had no intention of sampling the bag of the bee or patting the beaver on the back; the odds being distinctly in favour of his being badly stung or bitten if he were to attempt either. Well, well, those were mad and merry days, gone alas! never to return!)

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Of the other friends of my early manhood perhaps the most noticeable was Algernon Wynne. I was really more a friend of his than he was of mine, and if I saw a great deal of him in those days it was chiefly because he attached himself to me with a malignant fidelity which it was impossible to elude.

Wynne was a clerk in the Foreign Office, and both in character and manner the very antithesis of Ginger Hazelton. Dark and cadaverous in appearance, and wearing an habitually melancholy expression, he looked as though he were concealing a secret and lifelong sorrow on his bosom. He posed as being the "strong silent man" of whom one reads in novels (but fortunately rarely meets), and by the simple means of never saying a word and looking unspeakably wise, had acquired a reputation for mental acumen which never ceased to surprise his friends. He himself had grown so accustomed to it that he almost ended by believing himself to possess more than the average amount of intelligence, an illusion which was fos-

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tered by the flattery of foolish women, and added considerably to his already inordinate conceit.

Wynne had no sense of humour, and for this reason perhaps his society was much cultivated by the fair and more matter-of-fact sex. He would lean against the mantel-piece in a romantic attitude, for hours at a time, gazing into the eyes of some fortunate woman with a sublime air of selfconscious nobility which went straight to her heart.

A friend had once told him that he reminded her of Lord Byron—her entire knowledge of that poet having been gathered from a cursory and surreptitious perusal of *Don Juan*—and he spent his whole time trying to live up to the part assigned to him. He allowed his hair to grow long, affected an expression in which pathos, egoism, sensuality and mystery were equally blended, and always wore a velvet collar to his evening coat. If one can imagine a priggish and depressed Lothario with a Spartan fox gnawing ceaselessly at his vitals, some

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idea of Wynne's personality may be conceived.

His extraordinary affection for myself tempted him to cling to my society with a limpet-like constancy that was at times overwhelming. But I think he always felt rather out of place at Bellinger House. In his own home he was accustomed to being surrounded by people who were, or at any rate fancied themselves to be, more intellectual than the majority of mankind. Most of his men friends belonged to a select clique of young University undergraduates who posed as being excessively clever. Many of them affected the fashion then in vogue which ordained that carelessness of one's dress and appearance should be considered a sign of intellectuality. They seemed to fancy that a person's grey brain matter varied in inverse proportion to the amount of soap he used. They therefore allowed their hair to grow over their collars, never "dressed for dinner" if they could avoid doing so, and were scornfully intolerant of the incomprehensible cleanliness

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and stupidity of their fellowmen. These youthful geniuses read Schopenhauer and quoted him to their girl friends, collected unfinished drawings by unknown artists, played socalled "paper games" in the evening, and would scarcely condescend to associate with any one who might by a stretch of the imagination be termed an intellectual inferior. In such a circle Wynne shone brightly enough. At "letter games" he particularly excelled, knowing the names of more poets beginning with a B than any other player, and otherwise suitably distinguishing himself.

It was always very amusing to me to watch Wynne and Hazelton together. Each cordially disliked the other. In one another's company their mutual characteristics became unusually marked, Wynne growing more self-consciously gloomy and Hazelton more frivolous than ever. The latter always made a point of greeting Wynne with a smart blow on the back which he knew well to be irritating.

"Hullo, Algy!" he would say, in a loud voice. "Come to cheer us up, eh? How's

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the Little Lump of Fun? Pretty bob-bish?"

The Little Lump of Fun would regard the speaker with a look of silent disdain.

"Buck up, old cock!" continued Hazelton. "Merry and bright! Don't keep it all to yourself, you ray of summer sunshine!"

The Ray of Summer Sunshine suffered his friend's witticisms with the same dumb and sorrowful patience with which he endured his violent caresses. He seemed ever on the verge of a scathing reply, but the brilliant repartee which may have been hatching in his brain never reached fruition. Wynne always reminded me of a parrot that had not learnt to talk; the latent wisdom of his unuttered thought was so eloquently suggested by the profound air of reflection that his face habitually wore.

It was to Wynne, however, that I owed my first introduction to English literature of a really serious kind. As a young man I was naturally fond of literature, and before the age of thirty had read most of

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the "Badminton Library" and was intimately acquainted with many of our English classics, from "The Sentimental Journey" to "Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour." I was always a great admirer of Shakespeare, but have never had time to study his works since I left school. I could have passed an examination in any of Whyte-Melville's novels, and had read "Handy Andy" right through no less than four times. But it was not until Wynne drew my attention to them that I fully appreciated the gems enshrined in the works of many great writers of whom I had never before heard. At his instigation I began to keep a Commonplace Book, in which I copied out with great pains fragments that appealed to me from the works of Marcus Aurelius, Victor Hugo and Sir John Lubbock (now Lord Avebury). Even now, busy man though I am, I often look through that old book of mine and study those "jewels five words long" which I transferred so carefully to its pages: "It is not what we do, but how we do it, that counts in the eternal verities of

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Life." "*Tout ce qui est sera; tout ce qui sera a été.*" "Never brood; you are a man, remember, not a hen,"—how such epigrams stimulated and heartened me in those far-off days!

It was Wynne too, who inspired me with a love of poetry and taught me to discover the beauties of Adam Lindsay Gordon and (later on) of our two greatest living poets, Kipling and Ella Wheeler Wilcox. I could never face Tennyson or Keats or those other obscure bards, though I liked bits of Wordsworth about Lucy and Mary and so forth. I also delighted in Macaulay's "Lays of Ancient Rome" and was particularly fond of that poem of Burns' about a man being only a guinea stamp and all that.

Wynne pretended to be so cultured that he liked reading Meredith and Henry James, but of course this was only a pose, and he usually fell back upon R. L. Stevenson and Wilkie Collins. With a view to educating himself he even began to work his way through "Everybody's Encyclopedia of Literature," but mercifully

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stuck in the middle of Vol. XXIX (UNGF—YPSL).

He was a genuine admirer of Sir Walter Scott's novels, and tried in vain to make me share his affection for that writer. I liked Scott well enough as a poet, but could not stand him as a novelist. Indeed, one of the few real quarrels Wynne and I ever had was the result of my inability to keep awake while he read Sir Walter's works aloud for my especial benefit. It was a very hot day, I remember, and I was sitting in an easy chair with my feet on the mantel piece. As my friend's monotonous voice droned on I felt my attention gradually slipping away and my eyes closing. To this day I have no notion as to what he was reading, but I know what it sounded like:

“A fig for the idle lozel!” said the reeve. “Shall I be told to my beard by such an howlet that I cannot crack a fool's costard before May-day be done? Algates, borrel churl that thou art, I areed thee, withouten let, to recant thy selcouth leasings. Certes these cherisaun-

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ces are not devoid of advisement in antick glee-games. Pardie!"

"Holy-dam," replied his companion ruefully, "Thou hast said sooth for the nonce. He must have been the devil to yshent the juggler so reproachfully."

"That same borrel knight," quoth Hugh, "benemp him how ye may, was a sorry priscant knave."

"A sorry troll," cried Hob, "the foul fiend afray him! He is a carle, a princox! With his gay train as crank as peacocks, never to hansling a single cross with me!"

"Paravaunt," exclaimed the other, "the lurdane arraught him full couthly."

As the reeve uttered these words the Lady Egbertha entered. She wore a mantle of sendal and a surcoat of min-
ever over a watchet-coloured tunic and a white linen rochet. On her head was a wimple of samite surmounted by a volu-
pure of fine purfled satin and a gambason of coarse stammel. A gipsire depended from a baldrick of light blue tarentine at her side, and her orange-coloured kirtle and white courtpie were circled with a girdle of silver baudekin. . . ."

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By the time Wynne reached the baudekin I was fast asleep. He looked up, about four chapters further on, to find me snoring, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I prevailed upon him to forgive this unintentional insult to his favourite author.

Nowadays, alas! I scarcely ever have time to read anything but the newspapers, but I still belong to a circulating library, which sends me periodical parcels of books at which I glance, if I have time, after dinner, and I generally contrive to peruse the weekly literary reviews of the *Daily Mail*, and thus keep in touch with the great world of letters.

CHAPTER IV.

A DIGRESSION.

THE next few years passed by happily but uneventfully. I was now fully grown up—though perhaps my mental powers had scarcely reached maturity—and was gradually gaining that ripe experience of things which can only be obtained by close contact with the world of men and women. On looking back at this peaceful period of my existence I can find little that may be considered worthy of being placed on record. Indeed, the only incident that stands out at all clearly in my memory is of so trivial a nature that it seems almost an impertinence to commit it to paper. As, however, at the time, it made upon my mind a very strong impression, which the passage of years has not been able to efface, I may conclude that it was not without its value in the formation of my character. It may therefore be of some interest to those of my

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readers who have so patiently watched the unfolding and development of my faculties, and for that reason I have decided to include some brief account of it in these memoirs.

Like most young men of under thirty, I had never given very much thought to those social questions which in after life were destined to interest me so deeply. The eternal problem of Unemployment, the perpetual existence of grinding poverty within the very gates of the richest city in the world, did not touch me closely enough to divert my attention from those harmless but no doubt selfish pursuits in which I was then engaged. But I fully believe that it was due to the trifling events which I propose to narrate that my eyes were first opened to the inequalities of life, causing me to look down with sympathy and, I hope, with understanding upon those of my fellows whose lines were cast in less pleasant places than my own.

I have told the story of the downfall and dismissal of my father's trusted ser-

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vant, Alfred Carter, so often, that my relatives and friends are earnestly enjoined to skip this chapter altogether. I need not, however, offer an apology to the stranger for a tale which is not entirely without point or moral. I may add that the hero of my story—if a man of that class and with so low a standard of morality can be called a hero—is no longer alive; he died in the workhouse infirmary many years ago. But I am glad to say that I was able to be of service to him at the end, to cheer his last hours, and to fulfil his dying request by promising to send his son to a training-ship. (The lad subsequently emerged from that institution to enter the Marines and has already, so I understand, attained the rank of corporal, and hopes before he reaches the age of sixty to earn a military pension of nearly three shillings a week.)

I should explain perhaps that as a boy I was always a favourite with the servants at Bellinger House. I suppose it was the recollection of some early kindness on my part that induced Alfred Carter to send

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for me when he was dying, to beg me to look after his little son. It was at this final interview, which took place in the infirmary, that I heard the incidents which I have here pieced together into the shape of a story. I only wish I were able to describe them in the simple phraseology of the dying man, but that I will not attempt. A literary friend of mine to whom I related this account of Alfred Carter's Christmas Dinner (as I always call it) used it as the basis of a short magazine sketch. From this I have taken the liberty of quoting, with his kind permission, in the ensuing pages.

Three years before the date of which I am writing there was no more prominent feature of Grosvenor Square than the rotund and comfortable figure of Alfred Carter, hallporter at Bellinger House. It was impossible to pass my father's town residence, which (as everybody knows) is situated on the North side of the square, without catching sight of the familiar form of the sleek hallporter as he sat in his high oldfashioned chair at the broad

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bow-window that overlooked the front door, ready at a moment's notice to answer the bell or admit visitors.

For thirteen years, summer and winter, week in week out, had Carter occupied that leather-lined highbacked seat, which was a cross between a Sedan chair and a sentry-box, and, but for one unpardonable act of folly, he might in all probability have continued to fill the same eminently respectable position in Lord Bellinger's service for a still longer period.

Carter's duties were of a sedentary character, and far from arduous. For some ten or eleven hours a day, at the most, he was required to sit in the front hall, watching the traffic as it passed the window, or occasionally reading some sporting paper which he would hastily conceal at the approach of a visitor. Except on evenings when my father was attending a party or ball, which only occurred two or three times a week—when it was, of course, the hallporter's privilege to wait up until Lord Bellinger returned—Carter generally managed to get his

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day's work done by eight o'clock, and was free for the rest of the evening. It is therefore impossible to frame a reasonable excuse for the inexplicable moral lapse of which he was guilty at the very height of the London 'season'—a time when, if his duties were perhaps more onerous than usual, his responsibilities were all the greater and his need for vigilance all the more pressing; nor, indeed, did Carter himself ever make any serious attempt to palliate the heinousness of his offence.

It was the night of Lady Bluffshire's memorable ball at Leominster House, and my father, who had thoroughly enjoyed himself, was later than usual in bidding farewell to his hostess and summoning the carriage which had been waiting in the rain for the last two hours. It must have been nearly three o'clock in the morning before his brougham drew up at the front door of Bellinger House, Mayfair, and the diminutive groom, who had long been slumbering fitfully against the coachman's shoulder, sprang from the box

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and pealed the "visitors" bell. Strange to say, the summons was unanswered, and although the boy made several more attempts to attract the porter's attention, and the bell could be distinctly heard ringing in the front hall within, the door remained obstinately closed. By this time my father had grown impatient, and remembering that the latchkey which he seldom had occasion to use still hung upon his watch-chain, he stepped out of his carriage, unlocked the door himself, and in another moment was standing in his own front hall. Here a terrible spectacle met his outraged eye. Carter, the irreproachable Carter, the pattern family servant, the peerless hallporter, whose vigilance and sobriety had long been a matter of common knowledge in domestic circles, was lying curled up in a singularly ungraceful attitude in his chair, fast asleep! Not only was the man asleep; he was also snoring stertorously, and a faint aroma of alcohol which pervaded the front-hall lent a final touch of depravity to this unedifying picture of a faithless servant's perfidy.

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No good object can be gained by dwelling upon this painful scene. It is enough—though hardly necessary—to add that Carter lost his situation and was forced to leave Lord Bellinger's service at an early hour the next morning, without a "character" or the usual month's wages. As my father said to Lord Orpington, a frequent guest at Grosvenor Square, who remarked upon the absence of Carter's familiar figure from its accustomed place at the front door, "The man drank; I had to get rid of him."

Fond though I had always been of Carter, it was, of course, difficult for me to cherish any feelings of pity for a menial who had brought misfortune upon his head by his own criminal deviation from the path of moral rectitude. But, for his wife and child, who were thereby reduced to a condition bordering upon destitution, it was impossible to repress a certain measure of sympathy. Mrs. Carter had been lady's-maid to Lady Emily Wotherspoon, a situation which she unwisely renounced in order to marry Carter. She was a

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quiet, shy little woman of a colourless kind, foolishly fond of her husband, and sharing with him a pathetic devotion for their little son Bobby, a boy of five, for whom she was shortly expecting to provide a playmate. Carter's sudden dismissal proved a very severe shock to his wife, and as winter approached and the chances of his finding another situation grew more and more remote, the poor woman, whose condition was in any case a delicate one, became more colourless and fragile than ever, and was a source of ceaseless anxiety to her husband. The doctor whom he consulted ordered the invalid a liberal diet of beef-tea and port wine, but, as neither of these luxuries was within the reach of Carter's means, and both he and his wife were unable to overcome that foolish aversion to the work-house which is still prevalent even among the respectable poor, no one was much surprised when Mrs. Carter shortly afterwards left her husband a widower and her son motherless, taking with her a little baby girl the period of whose

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earthly existence could be expressed in minutes.

For some months, I believe, Carter continued to haunt the various domestic servants' registry offices of the metropolis, but without success. There was, very rightly, little hope of employment for a servant, no longer young, who could produce no 'character' save one with "Drink" writ large across it. From the "Butler's Agency," near Curzon Street, he obtained a brief situation as waiter at a public exhibition; at Mrs. Dunt's wellknown establishment in Baker Street he was less successful, though here he met an old friend—Lord Orpington's valet, in fact—who insisted upon his acceptance of a few shillings with which to buy clothes for little Bobby. Carter was, however, a reserved man, and when misfortune seized him in her ruthless grip, he made a point of keeping out of the way of any old friends who could possibly have helped him—though I believe he once wrote my father a letter which was never answered. He might have saved himself the trouble,

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for by the beginning of December they would certainly never have recognised in the brokendown, emaciated, seedy-looking individual who slouched along the shady side of the street, the unctuous, beliveried hallporter who once figured so prominently in Lord Bellinger's magnificent household.

Bobby, too, was looking thinner than usual, although I have been told that his father denied himself the very necessities of life in order that the little chap should not suffer. It was bad enough, thought Carter, to have killed his wife; it would be unbearable that his one irredeemable crime should have the result of hurting this innocent child as well. So he walked the streets, day after day, in search of employment; wearing himself to a shadow, and occasionally picking up an odd job or two which helped him to pay for the one squalid room, off the Euston Road, which he and Bobby shared.

Work was very scarce that Christmas, and Carter suffered more cruelly in the general lack of employment than did

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many of his fellows, since he had never been accustomed to hard manual labour, and the little pride that hunger had not driven out of his soul revolted against the idea of seeking food at Salvation Army Shelters or similar institutions of a charitable nature. By Christmas Eve Carter's total assets, after paying the exiguous rent of his room, amounted to tenpence. Eightpence of this was all that remained of half-a-sovereign he had earned a fortnight before by temporarily filling the place of a German waiter at a cheap restaurant in the City. The remaining twopence had been given him by a benevolent old lady whose horse-hair American trunk he had carried from Portland Place to Victoria Station. Tenpence is not a large sum, and Carter had no difficulty in making up his mind as to the most profitable way in which it should be spent. Two-thirds at least would buy a real Christmas dinner for Bobby, who had been talking of nothing else for the past ten days; the rest of the money Carter intended to devote—as he himself confessed

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—to the purchase of gin, a beverage which he knew by bitter experience to be a cheap if not altogether satisfying substitute for the Christmas meal which, as far as he was concerned, it must represent.

Gin, as we have all learnt from sermons, medical treatises, lectures, good books and other sources of inspired information, is the very hallmark of the Devil. The road to Hell is paved with empty bottles of "London Dry." It cannot be mentioned in polite society—except perhaps in conjunction with ginger-beer—and is the cause of half the poverty and suffering of which we read so much in the public press. Carter would undoubtedly have done better in every way if he had made up his mind to spend those two precious pennies upon, say, a cup of cocoa or two penny buns. But he had already given way, as we have seen, to the temptation which alcohol presents to the weakminded, and it was perhaps characteristic that his last coin should be wasted upon the accursed habit that held him in its thrall.

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It was Christmas Eve, then, and Bobby's patience, like his father's purse, was well nigh exhausted; so much so that Carter determined to anticipate the date of universal festivity by a day, in order to make quite certain that nothing should prevent the boy from enjoying his long promised Christmas dinner. Hand in hand the two marched off at midday to a small restaurant (which shall be nameless) situated at the back of Shaftesbury Avenue, where for eightpence it is possible to get a "cut from the joint and two vegetables," where Bobby was presently to be observed tucking in to a meal the like of which he had not tasted for many a long day. His father assured him that he himself had no appetite, a pious lie which the boy swallowed as readily as he did his Yorkshire pudding. But when the banquet was over, and Carter, who for the last halfhour had been suffering the tortures of Tantalus, suggested that they should return home—the thought of waiting any longer for that warming draught of gin was beginning to be un-

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bearable—Bobby begged so hard to be taken for a short walk along Regent Street, to look at the shop windows which at this season of the year present such a delightful spectacle, that his father found it impossible to refuse so harmless a request. Alfred Carter was loth to postpone his potations, but he had never yet taken Bobby into a public-house, and this was certainly not the day to begin such a practice; nor was it an occasion for thwarting the boy's wishes. So he strenuously pushed aside the deplorable thoughts of gin which were uppermost in his mind, lifted his little son on to his shoulder, and set off westwards with a resolute step.

Regent Street looked particularly attractive on this gloomy December afternoon. The slight fog served as an excellent background for the high lights which flamed out from every shopwindow, casting their brilliant reflection upon the damp pavements and the still damper streets. The jewellers' shops scintillated with the brilliance of a thousand gems;

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the window-displays of imitation diamonds glittered with a resplendent if meretricious glamour. But the window that seemed to attract more public attention than any other was that of a large toyshop, filled to the brim with all that the heart of the most exacting and fastidious child could desire, through the door of which emporium a constant stream of customers ebbed and flowed.

Bobby had not appeared to be very deeply interested in Parisian diamonds, mauve dressing-cases, silver inkstands, Liberty enamels. Even the photographs of the Stereoscopic Company left him comparatively cold. But at the sight of this amazing collection of toys his eyes grew as round and as large as plums, and he imperiously commanded his father to stop.

"Look, daddy, look!" exclaimed the boy, with a joyous cry, as he sprang down from his father's shoulder and forced his way unceremoniously through the crowd that blocked the pavement outside this blazing window. Alfred Carter looked,

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and saw a sight which for the moment almost made him forget his gin. The shop-window was aflame with colour. Dolls of every shape and size hung suspended from the ceiling, gazing straight in front of them with a far-away look in their glassy eyes. Woolly bears, monkeys, elephants, golliwogs, white rabbits, poodles—every conceivable variety of animal—were ranged on shelves round the wall. Pop-guns, trumpets, soldiers' helmets, toy-locomotives, boxes containing every kind of indoor and outdoor game, lay in bountiful profusion on the floor. While in the very centre of all this galaxy stood a tall Christmas tree, lighted by electricity, its branches loaded with silver globes, crackers, stockings filled with chocolate, air-balloons, small dolls, and a hundred other toys likely to appeal to the wishes of younger children. No wonder Bobby gasped with delight as he feasted his eyes upon so brilliant a scene!

Suddenly a shadow crossed the child's happy face; the corners of his mouth began to turn down in an ominous manner.

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Had it occurred to him, perhaps, that all this display of wonderful things was not really intended for him at all, that it was meant for some little boy whose father wore a thick astrachan overcoat, not for one whose father had no overcoat at all; for some little boy whose mother drove about in a fine big carriage, not for one whose mother drove (as he recalled the only occasion upon which he could remember her driving at all) in a hearse?

Carter, who had been an interested spectator at the toyshop window, felt his sleeve gripped by a fierce little hand.

"Wot's up, Sonny?" he asked.

"Let's go 'ome, daddy," said the boy, trying to draw his father away.

Carter looked down at the diminutive figure by his side, and was astonished to notice a large tear rolling solemnly down the little fellow's nose.

"Wot's the matter, Bobby? Anything wrong?" he enquired again. "Come, come," he added. "Men like you and me don't cry, men don't; 'specially not on Christmas Eve. Think wot mother would 'a' said!"

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“Muvver promised me—” Bobby hid his face in his father’s knee, and whatever his mother had promised was lost in the loud sob which he was unable to suppress.

“Wot did mother promise you, Bobby? A Christmas present?”

Bobby nodded through his tears. He was, as has already been remarked, a spoilt child, and his fond mother had always made a point of celebrating anniversaries—birthdays, Christmas and the like—by some small gift in commemoration of such festal occasions. Christmas was therefore associated in Bobby’s mind with the receiving of presents. On one famous occasion, two years ago, he had been the recipient of a wonderful scarlet tie with magenta spots, given him by no less a person than Lady Emily Wother-spoon, who had not altogether forgotten her old maid. The value of this gift—not perhaps a very appropriate one for a boy of four—was in no way lessened in his eyes by the fact, of which he was, of course, ignorant, that Lady Emily had originally knitted the tie for her husband,

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Colonel Wotherspoon, who had rejected it with scorn, declaring that it was quite impossible for a man of his hectic complexion to don an article which combined such vivid colouring with such execrable taste.

Alfred Carter read his son's thoughts and was not long in arriving at a decision. At all hazards the little boy's Christmas must not be spoilt.

"Just you wait a minute, sonny," he exclaimed, as he disengaged the boy's hand from his sleeve. Then, with a forced smile, he pushed Bobby back into his original position at the window, and, turning away, walked into the shop alone.

Once inside, Carter found himself surrounded by a motley crowd of well-dressed persons, all bent upon a similar errand. There were devoted mothers helping rosy-cheeked little boys to make up their minds as to the respective advantages of a toytrain or a box of soldiers; kindly uncles self-consciously choosing nude flaxenhaired dolls for nieces in the country; proud fathers with their arms

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full of elephants, golliwogs and drums. The shop-assistants were harassed, worried and overworked, and paid no attention to the seedy-looking man who stood shyly in one corner of the shop. At length, however, a smart young shop-walker noticed him.

"Are you being attended to?" he enquired urbanely.

"No, sir," stammered Carter.

"What can I show you, sir? Something for a little boy? Yes, sir, certainly. This way, if you please." He led the blushing ex-hallporter round the shop, taking him, no doubt, for an eccentric millionaire.

"These trains are very popular just now, sir. Only one pound eleven. May I wind it up for you, sir? No? Thank you, sir. Here is a box of soldiers, sir. Seventeen shillings. The uniforms are all correct, sir. Too expensive? What do you say to this little rabbit? You press the spring and it hops along. Very life-like, sir. Only six and fourpence."

"The fact is," said poor Carter, "the

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fact is, sir, I didn't want to spend more than tuppence."

"Two-pence!" exclaimed the scandalised shopwalker. "I'm afraid you've come to the wrong shop."

Carter turned to leave, almost glad of this loophole of escape from a spot in which he felt so thoroughly out of place. But the shopwalker's scorn suddenly turned to pity, and he stopped him. Perhaps the young man's heart was softened by the evident signs of privation upon Carter's face; perhaps his thoughts turned to his own poor lodging in Pimlico and to the little consumptive girl who was so anxiously awaiting his return with the promised gift from Santa Claus.

"Miss Bickers!" he called, to a young lady seated at a desk at the back of the shop, "Where are those damaged articles returned to us by Lady Galthorpe after her ladyship's schoolfeast?"

Miss Bickers pointed to a box in the corner.

The shopwalker crossed over and picked out a few of the broken toys. There

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was a drum which had been badly punctured, a golliwog that had lost its head, and a small Union Jack over which some careless person had evidently upset a cup of coffee.

"You can have this if you care to," he said, not ungraciously, pointing to the last named article.

Carter felt in his pocket for the two cherished pennies. It is not true to say that he had forgotten the "tot" of gin which they represented, but as his eye turned to the window and he saw there a little white mushroom which he recognised as Bobby's nose pressed persistently against the pane, the importance of alcoholic stimulant faded into insignificance beside that of his son's happiness, and he gratefully handed over the coins and received in return the battered flag which the shopwalker had by this time folded neatly in a large piece of paper.

Bobby's excitement during the remainder of the homeward walk was intense. He made many unsuccessful attempts to discover the exact nature of the contents

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of Carter's parcel; but his father kept the secret well.

"I know!" exclaimed Bobby, for about the twentieth time, as they reached the miserable little lodging and were climbing the rickety stair. "It's a effelunt with *real* tusks!"

"Wrong again," said his father, wishing that the boy's imagination did not always tend to such expensive subjects as elephants with real tusks.

At last the cheerless little attic was reached, the door carefully closed, and the precious parcel delivered into Bobby's feverish hands. With flaming cheeks he undid the string, unrolled the paper, and drew out the flag.

"Oh, daddy!" he exclaimed, with such a shout of pleasure that there could be no mistaking his genuine delight at the poor little gift.

Carter picked him up, flag and all, and drew him close, till he could feel the small warm lips touching the thin cheek that was so badly in need of a razor. There were tears in the man's eyes.

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"Oh, daddy!" said the boy again, as with a sudden outburst of gratitude he flung his arms round his father's neck and kissed him rapturously.

That, after all, was Alfred Carter's Christmas dinner.

I have ventured to describe this episode at some considerable length because, as I have already stated, it made a very deep impression upon my mind. Indeed, I was so moved by this glimpse into the lives of the lower classes that at one moment I had serious thoughts of trying to do good works in the East End of London, either for the Church Army or the Salvationists. I found, however, on looking into the matter, that this would entail the sacrifice of more time than I could possibly spare—I was playing polo four days a week at Ranelagh and had just bought six new ponies—and was consequently forced to relinquish the idea. Instead, I sent a small cheque to a Fund for the Relief of the Starving Poor of Lambeth, and as the result of this thoughtless act of charity was bothered

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for many years to renew my subscription.

The memory of Alfred Carter and his domestic troubles was soon to pale into insignificance beside that deeper tragedy which came to ruffle the calm of my hitherto placid existence. I refer, of course, to the destruction by fire of my ancestral home, Bellinger Hall.

CHAPTER V.

BELLINGER HALL.

IF BELLINGER HALL was probably the ugliest countryhouse in Kent, if not in the whole of England, it was certainly one of the most comfortable.

Originally built by my grandfather, Sir Percy Bellinger, in the early part of the late Queen Victoria's reign, it stood on the site of a little old redbrick Elizabethan farm-house which he had bought for a ridiculously small sum from a struggling farmer who did not appreciate its value.

My grandfather had a great deal of taste, and, as has been said of another more notable Englishman, it was all bad. With the assistance of one of the foremost craftsmen of his time and of a reputable firm of local builders, he replaced the original Elizabethan structure by a vast palace which was as unique a specimen of Victorian architecture as the most un-

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compromising of modern Philistines could desire. Even my deep affection for the old place could not altogether blind me to its ugliness.

The house was built of yellow brick, faced with plaster, in a style that was perhaps intended to be Gothic but only succeeded in being grotesque. It combined the most deplorable qualities of the Crystal Palace and the Imperial Institute, South Kensington. There was a touch of the austere but grimy dignity of Buckingham Palace about the front of the building, while the roof resembled nothing so much as that of a second-rate Turkish mosque. Ginger Hazelton used always to say that the outside of Bellinger Hall suggested a pompous Asylum for Eastern Potentates, relieved by a suspicion of Hydropathic Cathedral and a slight dash of Albert Memorial. Inside it was no better.

The interior of the house was decorated in a fashion to match the façade. The big hall, surrounded by galleries, which was the main feature of the inter-

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nal scheme, provided a very fair example of that style of decoration which Ruskin once referred to as "a cross between early Pullman and late North German Lloyd." Plush settees filled every available corner. The roof was upheld by heavy carved pillars of imitation marble which would not have deceived a fly. An eminent British artist had adorned the ceiling with a scene representing "The Banquet of the Gods," the latter being depicted as stout, décolleté, improper-looking individuals, apparently attempting to stay the pangs of divine hunger with ambrosial food of a particularly unappetising kind. The full beauty of this masterpiece could only be appreciated by lying on one's back on the floor, an attitude which few of my grandfather's guests cared to adopt.

The rest of the house was in keeping with the hall, though here and there some conspicuously audacious efforts had been made to introduce foreign novelties. Of these my grandmother's French sitting-room supplied a good example, of which she and my grandfather were extremely

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proud until an old friend administered a severe shock to their vanity. One day, when old Sir Percy Bellinger was showing the Duchess of Bognor round the building, he flung open the door of this boudoir with pardonable vanity. "This," he replied, "is our Louis Quinze room!" The Duchess gazed thoughtfully at it for a moment. "What makes you think so?" she enquired pleasantly enough.

My grandfather almost ruined himself over the building operations, and altogether ruined the reputation of his architect. On his death, when the property passed into my father's hand, Bellinger Hall was not only a hideous house, as I have described, but also an extremely uncomfortable one. My father, however, soon altered all this. He began by installing electric light; added an indoor tennis-court, a swimming-bath, three new wings, an elevator and an Aeolian self-playing organ, and turned the private chapel into a billiard-room. The improvements thus effected were remarkable. Tourists who were admitted on

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Thursday afternoons (at a shilling a head) to inspect the old oak-panelled reception-rooms, crowded with priceless furniture of every possible period which my father's agents had picked up for him at various sales all over the world, could not help declaring that here at any rate auctions spoke louder than words.

When my parents had been definitely settled for some years in Bellinger Hall they set about more seriously than ever to make their new home as habitable as possible. Hot-water pipes were laid along passages that had been hitherto unendurably cold in winter; the reproductions of Landseer's masterpieces which adorned the dining-room were replaced by valuable old prints; the cases of stuffed birds that had long been the chief decoration of the big hall were consigned to the lumber-room, together with the late Sir Percy Bellinger's collection of rare sea-shells and guillemots' eggs. Paraffin lamps gave place, as I have already said, to electric light; bathrooms sprang up like magic all over the house; the relics long

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associated with the memory of my sainted grandmother—including a number of milking-stools and tambourines, hand-painted with designs of blackberries and autumn leaves, and a varied assortment of china dogs of the most depressing breeds—were sent to the Vicar's parish jumble sale; and in due course Bellinger Hall, though still externally hideous, became as luxurious and comfortable a residence as the heart of the most fastidious could desire.

It was for many years one of the most popular country houses in England, and Royalty itself on more than one occasion condescended to honour my father by accepting his hospitality, shooting his pheasants and tasting his famous old Madeira. On such occasions no expense was spared in the entertainment of the party, and, after a long day's covert shooting, the guests would spend a happy evening playing Bridge or some other less intellectual card-game while they listened to the band which had been especially ordered from London for their delectation.

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My mother was, as I have explained, very musical, and usually insisted upon the engagement of Herr Bassano's well-known Pink Viennese Band. For less important parties, however, when only our close personal friends were present and there were no Royalties, an excellent but much less expensive orchestra from Maidstone was rightly considered to be more suitable. My mother's taste in music was eminently catholic; she believed in encouraging all forms of melody. Directly the band had finished playing the *Liebestod* from *Tristan* she would look up from her card-table, and say, with that charming smile of hers: "That was delightful, Herr Bassano. Now do you think you could give us 'Uncle Jonah's Teddy Bears?'" The appreciation of good music is infectious, and when a party of our guests at Bellinger has been engaged in playing "Animal Grab," "Cheating," "Demon Pounce," or some other rather noisy game, within a few yards of the orchestra, I have often known them to lower their voices perceptibly

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during the performance of the *Preislied* from Wagner's *Meistersingers*. Sometimes even, when the band's rendering of a composition by *Dvorak* was particularly moving, the cardplayers would cease shouting altogether for a few moments in order to listen to the music. Their thoughtfulness was well rewarded by a sight of the look of pleasure and astonishment upon Herr Bassano's expressive face. Though he had no desire, as he often assured me, to interrupt their conversation, it was nevertheless very gratifying for him to feel that some of the audience occasionally realised that his band was playing.

Bellinger Hall could at a pinch hold twenty-five guests, with their retainers, and, as my parents were both hospitably inclined, the house was generally crowded with friends from Saturday evening to Monday morning throughout the summer. These week-end parties at Bellinger were always a great success. As the last guest drove away to the station on Monday morning, my dear mother would

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turn to her husband with a smile of relief and say, "Thank goodness *that's* over! But I think they enjoyed themselves, John, don't you?" To which my father could conscientiously reply in the affirmative.

My twenty-ninth birthday happened to occur upon a Sunday in July during one of those lovely summers which we so rarely enjoy in England. Out of regard for my wishes the usual week-end party at Bellinger Hall had been abandoned, in order that I might spend the anniversary of my birth quietly with my family. I had, however, invited my two best friends, Wynne and Ginger Hazelton, to help me celebrate the occasion.

They arranged to catch the 6:45 from Charing Cross, arriving just in time to dress for dinner, while I was to come down earlier in the afternoon.

I arrived at Charing Cross station at about three o'clock on the Saturday, and strolled down the departure platform to a first-class smoking compartment. Here my man Gregson was waiting to hand me

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that sheaf of sporting papers with which it is my habit to relieve the tedium of a railway journey.

Having ensconced myself comfortably in the far corner of the carriage, and exchanged my hard billycock hat for a soft cloth cap, I selected the *Sporting Times* from my literary store and prepared to while away in as profitable a fashion as possible the hour that must elapse before I reached my destination. I was congratulating myself upon the good fortune which had secured for me an empty compartment, when, just as the train was starting, the door was violently flung open and my privacy was invaded by a fellow-traveller. I was naturally much annoyed at this unwelcome intrusion, more especially when I realised that the newcomer was a member of the fairer sex and that my hopes of smoking a cigar were consequently doomed to disappointment.

Furtively glancing at my companion round the corner of my paper, I was somewhat relieved to find that she was an extremely goodlooking girl, young, well-

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dressed and attractive. I buried myself once more in the *Pink 'Un* and became so absorbed in a culinary article by the "Dwarf of Blood" that the train was half-way through the first tunnel before I realised that my fellow-traveller was vainly wrestling with a window which obstinately withstood all her efforts to close it. Shocked at my own negligence, I sprang to her assistance, and together we managed to shut the window. As we did so the girl uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Is anything the matter?" I enquired politely, with the natural diffidence of one who addresses a stranger of the opposite sex.

"A dreadful thing has happened," she explained, holding out an empty hand, "I've dropped my ticket down inside the door!"

I expressed my sympathy in suitable terms, and spent the next ten minutes in adding my own to my companion's attempts to retrieve the lost ticket. All our efforts proved abortive, however, and, short of turning the carriage upside down,

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there seemed to be no possible means of regaining the precious piece of cardboard.

"Please don't bother any more," said the girl at last. "It doesn't matter a bit. I'm so sorry. Thank you very much."

I murmured something incoherent to the effect that it was no trouble at all, and returned to my corner of the carriage. The paper had, however, lost all interest for me, and for the next half hour I found myself reading the same paragraph over and over again without understanding a word of it, while my eyes showed an uncontrollable tendency to stray in the direction of my fellow-traveller. She happened to look up once to find my gaze concentrated upon her; whereupon we both blushed furiously and resumed the perusal of our papers with redoubled energy.

At Paddock Green a harassed railway official appeared upon the scene and asked for the travellers' tickets. I produced mine at once, but for obvious reasons my companion was unable to follow my example. She explained her inability at some length to the ticket-collector, and

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begged him to peer down into the recesses of the carriage-door and verify her statements. That official, however, was blessed with but little imagination and still less patience, and, after listening to an elaborate account of the accident, insisted that the ticket must be produced or, in default, the fare paid in full. The train was already ten minutes late, he observed, and he had no time to argue the case. The price of the ticket would no doubt be refunded by the Company on receipt of a plausible explanation of its loss.

"I do hope I've got enough money to pay," said the girl, as she extracted a gold chain purse from her dressing-bag and, after much fumbling, proceeded to empty its contents upon one of the seats of the carriage. The ticket-collector and I watched the appearance of a varied assortment of articles with the interested eyes of spectators at an exhibition of conjuring. The purse seemed indeed to possess many of the qualities of a wizard's magic bag. It disgorged its contents in as generous a fashion as that tall hat which

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the conjuror borrows from a member of the audience, which is invariably found to contain a colony of rabbits, a bowl of gold-fish, half a dozen pigeons and yard upon yard of coloured ribbon. From the recesses of this diminutive purse there first of all appeared a small powder-puff, two lace handkerchiefs and a packet of pins. These were speedily followed by a bundle of letters, a list of books to be ordered from the library (which, we may assume, had not been ordered), and a long jewelled chain to which were attached half a dozen charms and a gold pencil with no lead in it. To the heap that was now rising on the carriage-seat were gradually added a box of chocolates, three patterns of silk which their owner had spent the morning vainly trying to match at Starr and Garter's, and an unused kodak-film. Last of all came a two-shilling piece, four coppers, and a rather dingy halfpenny stamp.

"Six and eightpence is the fare, miss," said the ticket-collector, as the girl looked up enquiringly into his face with these

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coins in her hand. She counted them over slowly.

"Two and fourpence halfpenny?" she enquired tentatively.

"Six and eight," sternly repeated the man. He gazed without emotion at the pathetic treasures which were strewn upon the cushions, and was apparently unmoved by their silent appeal.

The girl's face fell as she suddenly realised that there was no prospect of her being able to pay the required fare. Perhaps in imagination she saw herself being arrested for attempting to defraud the Railway Company, haled back to Charing Cross in the guard's van, and thence, like Eugene Aram, setting forth to Bow Street between two sternfaced men, with gyves upon her wrists.

I had been watching with deep but silent sympathy the conflicting emotions which were only too visible upon my companion's expressive countenance.

"If you will allow me—" I began.

"Oh, I couldn't dream of it, really," she replied, brushing me politely aside. The

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idea of accepting money from a complete stranger was, I suppose, naturally repugnant to her.

"Six and eightpence," demanded the inexorable ticket-collector, weary with waiting.

"You really *must*," I insisted.

"If you don't think ——"

"Of course not!"

Without heeding her further expostulations I drew forth a sovereign from my trouser's pocket, paid the impatient official, and accepted my change and a written receipt for the money.

The train resumed its interrupted journey, and passengers who had thrust their heads out of the carriage windows ceased cursing the stationmaster or facetiously extolling the extraordinary speed and punctuality of South Eastern expresses, and returned to the perusal of their papers.

During the remaining twenty minutes that elapsed before reaching the wayside Kentish station for which we were bound, my new acquaintance and I conversed

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freely on the subject of the lost ticket. From this the conversation took a more personal turn, and we were glad to discover that Thorley was our mutual destination. I was going to Bellinger, as I have already explained, while my companion told me that she was also on her way to spend Sunday with her father, whose name she did not however divulge.

When the train reached Thorley I found myself singularly loth to leave my new friend. With a cunning of which I believe her to have been entirely unsuspecting I insisted that she must be feeling faint, after such a trying experience, and led her across to the refreshment-room in search of tea. Here a sharp-featured lady angrily served us with two cups of a dark-coloured fluid that had evidently been stewing on the counter for some hours, dealt out two stale buns with her fingers onto two damp and rather greasy-looking plates, dumped down a bowl of dusty sugar and a jug of bilious milk in front of us, charged us a shilling for the meal, and eyed us suspiciously while we consumed it.

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We spent a happy quarter-of-an-hour discussing the buns, while my father's horses and the girl's family coachman snorted with impatience at the door. It was finally with much regret that we said goodbye and departed in our separate conveyances to our respective goals.

I reached Bellinger in time for a second tea, and my friends Hazelton and Wynne arrived later. The next morning, as we sat round the billiard-room after breakfast, discussing the weather, I recounted my romantic adventure, much to the amusement of my guests. Wynne took the gloomiest view of the affair, and declared that I should never see my money again. In this he was entirely wrong, for the very next morning I received a postal order for 6s 8d, wrapped in a sheet of paper inscribed with the simple words "Many thanks." This delighted me so much that I made up my mind to leave no stone unturned to discover the identity of my fair travelling-companion. Circumstances, however, arose which drove the idea temporarily from my mind, and I

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am ashamed to say that it was not for over a year that I gave more than a passing thought to the lady whom I had met so romantically in the train.

The billiard-room at Bellinger was one of the few rooms in the house that had never been touched since the days of my grandfather. It still bore abundant evidence of his peculiar taste. A stuffed penguin gazed superciliously down from the mantelpiece, and one corner of the room was completely filled by a huge glass case in which a moth-eaten otter might be observed engaged in dissecting a salmon, while in the background a snipe was mournfully contemplating her young. The walls were decorated with a curious profusion of various trophies of the chase, ranging from the head of a mountain-goat to the fin of a tarpon. The coalscuttle was fashioned from an elephant's hoof; a stuffed ourang-outang stood by the door, holding out a tray for drinks; and a large tiger-skin hearthrug, fitted with the most alarming set of real teeth, formed a natural booby-trap over which each unsuspecting guest stumbled in turn.

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Hazelton was in the middle of a rather humorous anecdote (which he had been told by a friend in the city) when my father entered the room. The story came to an abrupt conclusion as Lord Bellinger appeared.

"If anybody cares about sea-shells," remarked the latter, addressing himself particularly to Wynne, "you ought to see my poor father's collection upstairs. He got hold of some very rare sea-birds too, in Asia Minor."

Wynne greeted the suggestion with a polite non-committal smile, but Hazelton was in a more than usually frivolous mood.

"Do I care about sea-shells?" he said. "'Care' is not the word! I love periwinkles with a devotion that mocks the power of words! Rare sea-birds, too, affect me profoundly. As for penguins, I have a perfect passion for them! I'd willingly walk twelve miles to gaze into the face of a defunct cormorant, or commune with an embalmed puffin. I simply worship the ground that seamews tread on! In

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fact, I often go to the Zoo on purpose to pat them."

"My poor father left a good many of his finest specimens to the South Kensington Museum," continued Lord Bellinger, who was too well accustomed to Hazelton's foolishness to take any notice of it.

"Indeed?" said Wynne, but without much enthusiasm.

"He shot a remarkable beast off the coast of the Hebrides, when he was a young man. Something of a dotterell in appearance. I forget what name he gave it."

"Dotterellonthecrumpet, I expect," suggested the irrepressible Hazelton. "Answers to the name of Willie. The only animal that habitually flies backwards to keep the dust out of its eyes!"

Wynne regarded the speaker with obvious disapproval, which the latter did not seem to notice.

"When I hear the plaintive voice of the curlew," he continued, "my bosom—"

At this moment the door opened and my mother appeared upon the scene.

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"Are you coming to church, Captain Ginger?" she enquired. "You don't look as though you were dressed for the part."

Hazelton was wearing a very lightcoloured flannel suit with a red and blue "Guards" tie and white tennis-shoes.

"Ah," he retorted, "there's many a devout heart beats beneath a loud check suit! But I think I shall struggle to keep away from church this Sunday. I went last Christmas, and I don't want to become a slave to a habit of any kind. But I shall certainly hold an open-air service of my own on the golfcourse. All are welcome, and there will be a collection afterwards for the deserving poor—by which I mean myself."

"The golfcourse doesn't seem a very suitable place," said my father, who was fond of a joke, "judging from the language one usually associates with the game."

"On the contrary," pursued Hazelton. "It's just the spot for a sermon. Who knows? I might convert one or two confirmed golfers, if I were only eloquent enough."

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He assumed an unctuous manner and a melancholy voice which he doubtless intended to be typically clerical.

"The world, my brethren, is one long Links of woe," he intoned. "Life is a game of golf. The caddy, Conscience, is ever at our elbow! Let us then keep our eyes fixed upon the ball! Let us look forward to the 'green' where we would be! So that when Bogey ——"

"I think this is very flippant," said my mother interrupting him.

—— "Let us arm ourselves with the 'driver' of Devotion, with the 'mashie' of Mercy, with the 'putter' of Purity! Then, my friends, when we fall into the yawning bunker of Temptation, we may lay hold with both hands of the niblick of ——"

"I don't care about this sort of joke at all," once more my mother interposed.

"I'm sorry, Lady Bellinger," said Hazelton. "I've always thought golf such a peculiarly sacred subject. I should wish nothing better than for my epitaph to read: 'He lay dead in two!' "

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"Nonsense! I don't believe you know anything about the game either."

"Not know anything about golf? Why, Lady Bellinger, I never do anything else, day or night! I always go to bed with a 'putter' under my pillow, in case I wake up early. So useful; I can putt myself to sleep again in a moment."

"What's your handicap?" asked my father.

"I haven't got one, but if I had it would be about *minus* scratch. Why, I did the short hole at Biarritz in one, last year, and would have done it in less but for the high wind."

"Really? I didn't know you were a golfer."

"And this is fame!" groaned Hazelton. "Why, I'm the man who invented the notorious golfball that simply *can't* be lost! Even if you send it into the 'rough' it tees itself up on the nearest tuft of grass and squeaks loudly for help until it's found. You can hear it calling for master a long way off."

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"So you're an inventor too," said Lady Bellinger.

"You've only to listen to his conversation—" put in Algy Wynne *sotto voce*.

"Yes," replied Ginger. "I taught Edison everything. What he knows and I've forgotten would fill a fattish book."

"What's your latest discovery?"

"I'm trying to patent a peculiar golf-club, a 'driver,' particularly suitable for beginners. The beauty of it is that there's a little trapdoor in the face of it. When you drive off the tee the door opens automatically and admits the ball into a secret chamber in the head of the club. The ball disappears, of course, and everybody thinks that you've made a wonderful drive."

"Well?"

"Well, then you shade your eyes, gazing away across the illimitable veldt to the distant horizon, as though following the flight of your ball towards the hole, and start walking to the green. By pressing a button in the handle of the club the trapdoor opens and the ball may be sur-

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reptitiously dropped wherever you like as you approach the flag."

"But wouldn't that be cheating?" asked my mother.

"I believe some straitlaced oldfashioned persons might so style it," he admitted. "But after all, there must be disadvantages to every new discovery. And I really believe that the introduction of such a weapon as mine will revolutionise the game of golf, if indeed it doesn't put a stop to it altogether."

"It's a quarter to eleven," said my father suddenly, looking at his watch. "We mustn't talk any more nonsense."

"Bellinger and I are going to church," added my mother, "but nobody need come who doesn't want to."

"I have to read the lessons," explained my father apologetically.

"I shall certainly come," said Wynne. "The choir sing so well, and Mr. Silsoe never preaches for more than a quarter of an hour."

"Almost thou persuadest me—" Hazelton began.

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"Now then, Captain Ginger," said my mother, "you had better come too."

"What have I done to deserve this?" he asked with a groan.

"It's what you *haven't* done. You haven't been to church for ages, and you know it."

"Aren't I too old to begin?" he pleaded.

"Certainly not!" My mother became inexorable.

"Go upstairs at once and put on some respectable clothes, and be ready to start in five minutes."

"Truly the way of the ungodly is hard!" said Hazelton as he retired to obey the commands of his hostess.

I did not go to church myself that Sunday, having a great deal of important correspondence to deal with. I was therefore still sitting in the billiard-room when the rest of the party returned from service.

"Was it nice?" I asked. "Did I miss much?"

"You missed the Litany," said my mother.

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"From all sick persons and young children, Good Lord, deliver us!" murmured Hazelton.

"And we had a harvest thanksgiving," said Wynne gloomily.

"Rather early in the season," added my mother. "They haven't carried the crops yet, but Mr. Silsoe likes to have it while we're still here, and, as you know, Dick, we go to Scotland next week."

"The pews were beautifully decorated," said Wynne, "and we had good hymns."

"Yes," Hazelton remarked,

"Little drops of water,
Little grains of sand,
Make the milkman wealthy,
And the grocer grand!"

"There was a melon in the font," he pursued, "that fairly made my mouth water, and I thought the hops round the pulpit most appropriate. But we were halfway through the extremely proper psalms for this morning's service before I discovered that I had been kneeling on a

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tomatoe. I can't help thinking it a mistake to decorate the chancel with bananas, first of all because they can hardly be termed a homegrown fruit, and secondly because its putting temptation in the way of the choirboys."

"Who's coming to see the horses?" asked my father, suddenly changing the subject.

"I'm not," replied Hazelton at once with determination.

"Aren't you fond of animals?"

"Certainly. But I don't like them enough to spend an hour on a fine Sunday morning examining twenty-five carriage horses, one at a time, and making intelligent remarks about their legs to a coachman who sees through me from the start. I belong to a League," he continued, "whose members are bound by the most sacred oath to stay away from the stables after church. Our crest is very pretty—two crossed carrots *rampant* surmounted by a lump of sugar *gules*. I believe everybody would like to join us, if they had the pluck."

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"I certainly shouldn't," said my mother. "I love the dear things, with their soft velvet noses and their satin coats."

"Then you'd love the members of my League," replied Hazelton. "We all have satin coats, and waistcoats too, and our noses are more like velvet than any noses you ever met. We have them ironed with our top-hats every morning. Look at *my* nose, all of you! Isn't it a dream? The maiden's plush!"

I have ventured to give this trivial glimpse into our simple life at Bellinger Hall for the purpose of showing how happy we all were at this time, and how utterly unprepared for the catastrophe that was so soon to overwhelm us. This I propose to describe in another chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRE.

It was our habit at Bellinger to retire to bed earlier than usual on Sunday evenings. We spent a pleasant hour or two after dinner singing hymns and sacred glees, and at about half-past ten the butler announced the arrival of barley-water and bedroom-candlestocks, and we trooped off to our rooms.

My bedroom was an apartment of the kind ordinarily assigned to bachelors, small and cheerless, overlooking the back porch. It was the room I had always occupied as a boy, and for the sake of old associations I loved it and had often refused to move into a larger one. A writing-table stood by the window, furnished with paper and pens and ink, a printed notice showing the hours of meals and of the arrival and departure of the daily post, and a card containing a short *résumé* of the local railway timetable. A small

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gilt clock, whose hands pointed mendaciously to a quarter past six, ticked furiously on the mantelpiece, as though trying to make up for lost time. An engraving of "The Soul's Awakening" on one wall was balanced by a copy of "The Gambler's Wife" on the other, while over the bed hung a few cheap sporting prints and a photograph of a Botticelli Madonna.

The habit of labelling things was strong in my father's household. All the match-boxes were labelled "Matches," and the cakes of soap had "Soap" written across them, so that there could be no possible excuse for mistaking one for the other. A small drinking-trough in the hall was carefully marked "Dog," presumably with the object of preventing absentminded visitors from making use of it; and outside my bedroom were three scarlet pails of water inscribed with the legend "Fire Only," as though to warn off (or assist) the thoughtless guest who might be tempted to slake his thirst during the night.

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For a long time I could not get to sleep. My room seemed unaccountably hot and stuffy, and though I opened the window as wide as possible and held the door ajar with a book, I was conscious of an atmosphere of airlessness and oppression which kept me wide awake for more than half the night.

I lay listening to the stable clock chiming the hours, one and two and three o'clock, with that hideous interval between each stroke whose terror only the victim of habitual insomnia can fully appreciate, and began to think that sleep was to be for ever denied me. I pictured myself coming down to breakfast with a haggard face, telling everybody that I hadn't slept a wink all night, a statement which they would not believe, or, if they did, would probably take not the slightest interest in.

It was nearly four o'clock when I finally dosed off, and I was justly aggrieved at being awakened half an hour later by an extraordinary noise which proceeded from the adjoining room which was occupied by Algernon Wynne.

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I sat up in bed and listened. From the scuffling sounds which I could hear faintly through the intervening wall it seemed to me that my neighbour must be engaged in a rat hunt. Furniture appeared to be overturned, and there was the occasional crash of broken crockery.

I was about to get out of bed to investigate the matter when my door was pushed open and Wynne appeared on the threshold with a pale and startled face.

"Have you got any salt?" he demanded abruptly.

"Salt? No, of course not. What on earth do you mean? Is there a bird in your bedroom?"

"My beastly chimney's caught fire," he answered, "and I can't put it out. I've poured about a ton of water on to it, but it's still alight and burning like blazes."

I hurriedly put on a dressing gown and accompanied my friend to his room. The fire had been raked out into the fender, and the smouldering embers were spluttering in a pool of water in the rapidly

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rusting grate. A dull roaring sound and a lurid gleam of light from the chimney proclaimed without doubt that the flue was well alight.

"There's a trap door at the end of the passage," I said. "It probably leads on to the tiles. We'd better go up there and sluice the chimney from above."

Wynne and I ran along the landing, found a small ladder hooked up to the wall, propped it against the trap door in the ceiling and passed through on to the roof. Smoke and flames were issuing from the chimney in great quantities.

"By Jove, it's burning! Eh?" exclaimed Wynne in some alarm.

"You bet it is!" I said. "You stay here," I added. "There's a row of buckets in the passage. I'll hand them up to you."

The contents of the three pails marked "Fire Only" were poured down the flaring chimney, but had as little effect as the liquid (suspected by some of being petroleum) with which Elijah encouraged the combustion of his altar pyre. The water only seemed to stimulate the conflagra-

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tion, and it was evident that more drastic measures must be taken to subdue it.

"Feel the roof," said Wynne suddenly. "It's quite hot. It's burning through my slippers."

"So it is. This is a bigger job than we thought. We'd better get assistance. What on earth did you want with a fire in your bedroom on a hot night like this?" I asked indignantly.

"I thought it rather cold when I dressed for dinner, so I lit it. Is there a fire brigade near?"

"Yes," I answered. "I'll go downstairs and telephone to Thorley for the engine."

I ran back to my room and quickly donned some of my evening clothes which were lying in a confused heap on a chair by the bed. As I hurriedly caught up my gold watch and chain from the dressing-table a piece of plaster fell upon my head from the corner of the ceiling. Looking out of the window I saw that the whole front of the house was brightly illumined by the fire on the roof.

There was no time to lose. I jammed

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the back of a chair against the button of the electric bell beside the fireplace, in such a way that it would ring continuously in the basement and thus arouse the servants. Having done this I ran along the corridor, descended the main staircase and so reached the "business room" where the telephone was kept. I managed with some difficulty to establish communication with the Thorley post-office and explained the situation. I then hastened to the servants' quarters, and in a short time had aroused the whole household, including the night-watchman whom I discovered asleep in the pantry.

Meanwhile the flames had spread with startling rapidity, and the clouds of smoke issuing from the bachelors' wing rendered it impossible for anyone to approach the actual seat of the conflagration.

My mother was one of the first to appear upon the scene, clad in a short dressing-jacket and petticoat, and armed with a waterbottle which she had picked up from a neighbouring washhandstand. Her contribution towards the general en-

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deavour to arrest the progress of the fire consisted in vaguely hurling the water-bottle, glass and all, in the direction of the flames. Had her aim been as excellent as her intention it is doubtful whether this pint of water could have stemmed the course of the fire. As it was, the water-bottle spent itself comparatively harmlessly upon the head of the second-footman who was gallantly attempting to manipulate a "patent fire extinguisher" which long disuse had rendered impotent.

In the meantime my father hurriedly despatched a servant to the stables to summon the private fire-engine, an old-fashioned affair, worked by hand, which had not been in use for over half a century.

The head coachman had, of course, mislaid the key of the shed in which the engine was kept, and by the time the doors had been broken open and the ramshackle old machine dragged by many willing hands to the front of the house, half the roof was on fire, and there seemed no reason to suppose that the other half would not shortly follow suit.

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With some difficulty a length of hose was attached to the main, and panting stablemen began to work the pumps with less skill than goodwill. But either because the water-supply was inadequate, or the hose leaked in a hundred different places, or the fire-engine was so primitive as to be useless, their labours only resulted in a thin jet of water which rose like a toy fountain to an altitude of about ten feet and then fell harmlessly on the outer walls of Bellinger Hall. As a means of watering the plants in the garden our private fire-engine might possibly have been effectual, but for the purpose of extinguishing a fire it was altogether futile.

Hazelton had by this time turned up and on his suggestion a different plan was adopted. He arranged all the available menservants in a long line from the fountain to the house, and buckets were passed from one to the other as rapidly as possible. This human chain, by which it was supposed to supplement, or rather replace, the useless hose, would have been more effectual but for the spasmodic anx-

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iety of its links to hasten the course of the replenished pails. Their zeal defeated its own object. Each bucket would leave the fountain filled to the brim, and then gradually empty itself over the boots of all who handled it, until by the time it reached the burning edifice there was only a teaspoonful or so of water left to testify to the energy and devotion of the volunteer fire brigade. The butler, whose duty it was, as the final link of the chain, to cast the contents of the bucket upon the flames, was so overcome by the responsibility of his position that on three separate occasions he added fuel to the fire by casting the bucket in as well.

We soon realised that this system of spraying the scorching house with a light sprinkling of water was as useless as the private fire apparatus.

"I'm afraid we must wait for the Thorley engine," said my father at last. "We can do nothing but salvage work until it arrives."

"It ought to be here shortly," I put in. "I telephoned an hour ago."

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"In the meantime we had better turn to and fetch out all the valuables. We can pile them here on the lawn. It's a fine morning and they won't be hurt."

Servants, gardeners, stablemen, helpers and the night-watchman (by this time wide awake) set to work upon the task of removing the pictures and furniture to a safe place, and presently a large heap of the more precious of my father's household gods was raised about forty yards away on the tennis-lawn. The two Vandycks from the dining-room were carefully swathed in blankets and placed in a summerhouse, together with the huge square of tapestry in the hall representing Aeneas taking a lachrymose farewell of Dido.

Hazelton came struggling out of the door bearing a huge stuffed bird in his arms.

"I've saved Percy the penguin, at the risk of my life!" he exclaimed joyfully. "What price the Victoria cross?"

He was followed by the second-coachman, dragging out a large armchair of no

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earthly value. The man touched his hat to me as he passed, just as though nothing unusual were happening, and nearly collided with the hall-boy who was carrying the bust of Charles James Fox which had stood for so long at the top of the stairs.

Mr. Minting, my father's agent, bicycled up at this moment, and after a few words of condolence hastened to the "business room" to save such of the estate papers, receipts and other documents, as were stored in the pigeon-holes of that gloomy apartment.

At any other time our appearance would have evoked merriment. Wynne had hurriedly encased his legs in white flannel trousers, borrowing a sable coat from the front hall on his way out, to complete his attire. Hazelton was the only member of the houseparty who might be called properly dressed. He had arrayed himself in full evening garb, with white waistcoat, diamond solitaire and patent leather pumps, though the wall of his room had actually cracked as he was tying his "butterfly" tie. His immaculate

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appearance did not however prevent him from doing his share in the work, and he entered into the spirit of the thing completely, making the salvage of my late grandfather's museum his especial care. It is indeed unlikely that in the annals of our domestic history there is any record of a man having saved so many stuffed birds from destruction.

My mother's little Aberdeen terrier, Bramble, too, was working as hard as anybody. To Bramble the whole affair appeared in the light of a rat-hunt on a gigantic scale, and he consequently enjoyed himself thoroughly. Each time a piece of furniture was moved Bramble would make a dart behind it, in the hope of securing the rodent in search of which his human friends were evidently determined to turn the whole place upside down. He had a particularly good time in the "business-room." Here he discovered a pigeonhole full of documents which no one else had touched. In imitation of Mr. Minting he dragged these out on to the floor, and then (unlike Mr.

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Minting) proceeded to worry them to pieces. One large bundle he brought out on to the lawn and laid at his mistress's feet, awaiting the praise which his efforts undoubtedly deserved. My mother picked up the parcel and saw that it appeared to contain a number of plans and maps. She handed it to my father who happened to be passing at the moment.

"Where did you find these?" he asked, examining the papers with care.

"Bramble brought them out," she explained.

"This is a most valuable find," replied my father. "Most valuable indeed. There is nothing I would not sooner have lost. Good little dog!" He stopped to pat Bramble, but the dog scorned his thanks and rushed off after Wynne who was just re-entering the drawing-room window.

The butler came running up at the same moment.

"The engine's arrived, m'lord," he exclaimed.

"I'm afraid its too late to do much

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good," said my father resignedly, with true prophetic instinct.

It was indeed nearly seven o'clock before the engine from Thorley came lurching up the avenue, too late to be of any practical use.

The Thorley fire brigade was an amateur affair, and had seldom been called upon to extinguish anything more important than a stack of some local farmer's straw. When I had telephoned to summon the engine to Bellinger there had been a great commotion in the village. A good three quarters of an hour had elapsed before the members of the brigade could be collected, and it took another twenty minutes to borrow a pair of horses suited to the task of dragging the engine.

The firemen took the precaution of fortifying themselves with several glasses of whiskey and water at the "Bull" Inn before starting. Two miles from Bellinger, as they were galloping round a sharp corner, one of the horses slipped up on the side of the road and the engine was precipitated headlong into the ditch. No one

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was hurt (except the horse)—Providence being notoriously watchful of deciduous inebriates—but this accident added considerably to the delay.

It was only with the assistance of a number of yokels, who were setting out to their morning's work, that the engine was righted, and the injured animal replaced by a sound one. The firemen meanwhile partook freely from a bottle of spirits with which the captain of the brigade had wisely provided himself, in case of accidents. When, therefore, they eventually arrived at Bellinger, it was obvious to the meanest capacity that half their number were as Hazelton observed "blind to the world," and the other half well on the road towards intoxication.

As there was now no hope of saving the house from being gutted, my father felt much inclined to dispense altogether with their services. The roof had fallen in at several points, the first floor was unapproachable, and of all the downstairs rooms the drawing-room alone remained intact. But under the butler's direction

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the Thorley firemen managed to pull themselves together sufficiently to concentrate their attention upon saving this portion of the building. Two of them, however, were so obviously incapable of any sober work that they were ordered away, and shuffled off in a tearful condition to a safe distance, where they sat down on the lawn and proceeded to fall fast asleep.

As there was considerable danger from falling beams, Hazelton and I borrowed the helmets of these two drunkards, and the work of salvage continued.

Once a man gets an axe into his hands the temptation to chop down anything within reach is almost irresistible, and ten minutes after the Thorley firemen had been turned loose into the drawing-room of Bellinger Hall the few remaining contents of that room had been reduced to firewood. Insensate destruction is a vice common to all firemen. For whereas the ordinary individual desirous of saving a picture will lift it carefully from the wall, the man with the hatchet chops it

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down with a fierce blow, and the odds are a thousand to one that both frame and glass are broken to pieces. In the history of conflagrations it is a well-known fact that firemen have always done far more damage than the flames themselves, seeming to delight in a senseless demolition of whatever the fire has left untouched.

The ceiling of the drawing-room was beginning to bulge in several places as I issued from the window for about the twentieth time, carrying a small bookcase on my head. With my face as black as pitch, and my eyes red and streaming, I looked more like a dissolute chimney-sweep than anything else, a suit of torn evening-clothes surmounted by a fireman's helmet adding considerably to the peculiarity of my appearance.

"Is there nothing that *I* can do?" my dear mother asked, as she stood and watched us at work. "I want to be useful too."

"I'll tell you what, mother," I suggested. "You might see if you can collect some food. All those good people will be

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as hungry as ravens when this show is over."

"Of course I will," she answered eagerly. "The dairy's close by. I'll go and see if they've got anything there."

At eight o'clock, after a brief consultation with the butler, my father gave orders that no more attempts should be made to enter the burning building. Ten minutes later, the drawing-room ceiling fell in with a loud crash.

The whole household, by this time thoroughly exhausted, now collected upon the lawn and silently watched the demolition of their home, while the Thorley brigade continued to pour a stream of water upon the blackened walls.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good," I remarked to Hazelton in a quiet aside. "The house is heavily insured, I know, and we've managed to get out nearly everything of value. Nobody could ever have possibly admired the architecture of Bellinger, and now my father will be able to rebuild it and make a really beautiful place of it."

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Lord Bellinger was standing a few yards off, out of earshot. My mother came up and laid her hand on his arm.

"Well, old girl," said my father with an attempt at gaiety. "The old place has gone this time, eh?"

"We must only be thankful that no one has been hurt," she replied with her usual unselfishness. "And now," she added, "everybody must come and have some food. The maids and I have been busy for the last half hour scraping up a meal of some kind."

"By Jove, that's thoughtful of you," said Hazelton, "I could eat my hat, I'm so hungry."

A general adjournment was made to the dairy, where most of the women servants were already assembled and two long tables had been prepared for breakfast.

The meal consisted of large bowls of "scrambled eggs," which the dairymaids had hastily cooked, hunks of bread and bowls of fresh milk.

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"Sit down everybody," ordered my father, "and fall to! Come along, Preston," he added, turning to the headcoachman. "Tell all the servants that there's breakfast of a kind waiting for them here.

"I want to thank you all very much for your help," he continued, as the whole household sat down to the table and prepared to enjoy this improvised meal. "You've all worked like Trojans, and if we couldn't save the old place, it isn't anybody's fault but my own.

"I know you will be glad to hear," he went on, "that among the many papers saved are the original designs made by my poor father's architect." Bramble wagged his tail selfconsciously underneath the table. "It will therefore be possible to rebuild Bellinger Hall upon exactly the old lines."

This announcement was greeted in respectful silence, though Hazelton could hardly help exclaiming "Good God!" under his breath, and I heard Wynne give vent to an audible groan.

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"And while I must apologise to everybody," continued my father, turning to Wynne and Hazelton, "for having caused so much inconvenience, I hope that before very long you will be present at another house-warming—of a pleasanter description—at Bellinger Hall!"

"Three cheers for Lord Bellinger!" cried the agent hysterically.

"'Ip, 'ip, 'ip, 'ooray," shouted the butler, and the cry was taken up by all the servants, and repeated until the rafters of the dairy rang with their cheers.

A boy on a bicycle rode up at this moment and handed a telegram to Lord Bellinger. He passed it across to my mother who read it out.

"So distressed to hear of your calamity," it ran. "Hope you and all your friends will come as my guests to Mimsey to-day. Am sending motors to fetch you. Shall expect you to luncheon. Stay as long as you like. LOUISE PENTLAND."

"Devilish kind of the old Duchess," was my father's comment. "It certainly

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solves the situation. I can arrange for the servants to move in to the Bull Hotel in the village to-night."

"I shall have to go to London anyhow," said Hazelton, "I've got a Court Martial, though I shall be several hours late for it."

"I'm afraid I must be off too," added Wynne. "I've got to be at the Foreign Office soon after twelve."

"I'm sorry," said my father. "But we can easily send you to the station. The carriages and horses are all we have left in the way of hospitality to offer our guests."

"That reminds me," I said. "I could do with a wash. Perhaps Preston could supply us with a bucket and a bit of soap."

"By all means," answered my father. He called to the coachman. "Preston, take these gentlemen to your house, will you? and give them everything they want."

"Very good, m'lord."

"Personally I shall require a curry-comb and a bran mash," said Hazelton.

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"And some carrots?" suggested Wynne.

My two friends and I moved away to the stables, where the coachman supplied us with soap and towels and also lent us various garments from his own wardrobe to supplement our somewhat scanty attire. Wynne borrowed a livery coat with brass buttons and a cockaded hat in which he looked particularly comic, and Hazelton attired himself in a complete suit of Sunday clothes lent him by one of the stablemen.

I washed the dirt from my hands and face in a bucket, got Mrs. Preston to sew up a rent in my evening trousers and was thus able to put in a fairly presentable appearance on my return to the garden.

As there seemed to be little need for my presence beside the smouldering ashes of my home, I decided to travel up to London with Wynne and Hazelton. In half an hour we had taken a last look at the ruins of Bellinger Hall, and were on our way to the station.

It was a blazing hot morning when Hazelton and I stepped into an empty

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first-class compartment of the London train. Wynne, still wearing his livery coat, elected to travel third-class as being more in keeping with his get-up. Our attire had provoked some natural curiosity in the booking-office, and we were glad to escape into the seclusion of our respective railway carriages. My evening dress, much bedraggled, was covered but not concealed by a thin overcoat, while one of my father's old black slouch hats of immense proportions, rescued from the front hall, reposed on Hazelton's narrow head and threatened at any moment to engulf it.

At Paddock Green my companion hurriedly withdrew his patent-leather shoes from the cushions of the seat on which, contrary to the regulations, they were resting, as an elderly gentleman climbed into our carriage. Our fellow-passenger was a stout, middle-aged individual, wearing a long black frock-coat, shepherd's plaid trousers and a grey waistcoat. Across the broad expanse of the lastnamed garment a heavy length of thick gold

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watch-chain sought in vain to restrain the ripe contours of his ample figure. He looked quickly across at us as he entered, attracted no doubt by the peculiarities of our attire, and then gazed long and intently at me, as though my appearance had struck some chord in his memory.

"I hope, sir, you have no objection to my smoking a cigar," he said, bowing with an oldfashioned courtesy in my direction.

"None at all," I replied, "I should like it."

"So should I," added Hazelton ubiquitously.

"Very hot weather we are having," our companion pursued, turning to the last speaker.

"Very," answered Hazelton. "The closer you get to London the closer it gets."

"I hope you will forgive my impertinence," said the other, subjecting me to a further scrutiny; "I did not at once recognise you. Now that I see who you are I

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should like to take this opportunity of thanking you for the many hearty laughs you have so often given me in the past."

I remained silent. I could not remember ever having seen this old gentleman before, far less could I recollect any occasion on which I had made him laugh heartily. I shot an enquiring glance at Hazelton, who merely tapped his forehead with his finger, delicately hinting that our fellow-traveller was a harmless lunatic.

"Bats in the belfry!" he said in an undertone. "Off his trolley! Balmy on the crumpet! We must humour him."

"Many a time have you puzzled me with your card tricks," continued the old gentleman with much urbanity.

"Indeed?" I answered rather coldly, while Hazelton could scarcely conceal a smile.

"Yes. I have a little boy at home who thinks the whole world of you. I took him to London on purpose to see you last Christmas, and he's been practising your sleight-of-hand ever since."

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"Card tricks? Sleight-of-hand?" I repeated, thinking that the conversation appeared to be taking an unpleasant turn. "There must be some mistake, I fail to understand."

"Excuse me," replied the other. "Am I not addressing Lieutenant King, the worldfamed ventriloquist and conjuror? Surely I cannot be mistaken. I have seen you so often at the Palace Theatre, and once, I remember, at a children's party given by Lady Jennings in Berkeley Square. I shall never forget how I roared at your farmyard imitations. When you brought that bowl of goldfish out of the Admiral's pocket I thought I should have died, he looked so surprised. Your imitation of a dog being run over by a motor is, if I may be allowed to say so, quite admirable. As for the way you mimic the opening of a soda-water bottle—perfect, my dear sir, perfect! How you can think of all those amusing things, I'm sure I don't know."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," I replied, not I hope impolitely, "but I'm

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afraid you are labouring under a grave misapprehension. I couldn't produce a bowl of goldfish out of an admiral's pocket, not for a thousand pounds. If you were to lend me your watch and a couple of eggs in the hope that I should make an omelet in your opera-hat, you'd be terribly disappointed at the result. I'm no conjuror, I'm sorry to say. I've often longed to be able to juggle, but I can't do it without breaking the crockery. I'm ashamed to have to admit it, but I'm just a plain man who never gave an imitation of a soda-water bottle in the whole course of my life."

"I'm sure I beg ten thousand pardons," said our companion, with some confusion. "You must think me very rude. I fancied that I recognised Lieutenant King. I imagined from your—if I may say so—rather unusual attire that you were probably on your way to attend a children's party. I thought this—er—gentleman"—he glanced at Hazelton—"was your assistant. I hope you will forgive my stupidity."

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"Pray don't mention it," I replied. "There's no reason for apologising, Mr. —er—er—"

"Warlingham's my name—Lord Warlingham."

"I'm delighted to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance," I answered. "I have so often heard my father Lord Bellinger speak of you."

"So you're Bellinger's boy, are you?" said Lord Warlingham. "Your father and I are old friends. I can't apologise enough for my idiotic mistake. I should have seen at once that you were no conjuror."

"I'm sure I look more like a waiter than anything else in these clothes," I assured him, as I proceeded to give a brief account of our recent adventures, at the end of which I took the opportunity of introducing Hazelton. Lord Warlingham was still much upset, and continued to apologise profusely.

"It is dreadful of me to have taken you for a conjuror's assistant," he declared.

"Not at all," said Hazelton. "I only

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wish I were in any way connected with so hardworking a profession. The nearest I can get to it is that a cousin of mine knows the man who writes the music for the Performing Dogs at the Hippodrome."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. Very difficult music to compose, so I'm told. Just a little more classical than the tunes for acrobats, but not quite so good as the cinematograph compositions."

By this time we had reached Charing Cross station, and after further mutual protestations of friendship, Hazelton and I bade farewell to our new friend and proceeded to our several destinations.

This adventure, though slight in itself, was destined to have far-reaching consequences. Indeed, it would not be untrue to say that upon it to some extent depended not only my own future fate, but also that of the whole race of Bellingers.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO CAMPAIGNS.

THE next event of any real importance in my life was the South African War. As, however, so many books have been written upon the subject, and the campaign itself has by this time become nothing more than a painful memory to most of us, I propose to deal as briefly as possible with my own connection with it.

My father, as is well known, was one of the first as well as one of the greatest Imperialists of his time. If he were alive to-day he would most certainly be in favour of Tariff Reform and Colonial Preference; he would insist that British taxes should all be paid by the foreigner. As it is, he was fated to live in an age when Free Trade was still the national policy beneath which England struggled and, I must admit, prospered.

When the war broke out my father had long ceased to take any active part in

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politics, but his interest in the affairs of the nation was as keen as ever; advancing years had not in any way diminished his enthusiasm for Imperial concerns. Lord Bellinger was no armchair critic; his loyalty was not merely confined to lip-service. On one occasion, indeed, while travelling upon the Underground Railway, he went so far as to assault an old gentleman who happened to remark that upon some portion of the British Empire the sun was always setting—a statement which my father rightly considered to be unpatriotic, if not actually disloyal. Later on, on Mafeking Night, he distinguished himself by utterly ruining two silk hats and losing his watch and chain, in an attempt to join wholeheartedly in the glorious scenes of public thanksgiving in which Londoners took so active a part. Again, although his doctor had forbidden him to expose himself to the night air, he insisted upon being present in a box at a West End music hall when a wellknown actress recited a patriotic poem in which Britain was urged to contribute to a fund

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on behalf of the relatives of those heroes, whether the offspring of dukes or cooks, who were fighting their country's battles on the veldt. When a shower of copper bullion rained upon the stage at the conclusion of this performance, Lord Bellinger was so carried away by emotion that he not only emptied his pockets of all his loose pennies, but even added to this generous financial bombardment an expensive gold matchbox. This caused some confusion by striking the Chef d'orchestre on the head and afterwards exploding among the bassoons.

My regiment was ordered to the front at the very commencement of hostilities, and it was with a joyful heart that Hazelton and I hastened to our tailors in Conduit Street to order the new uniforms in which it was to be our privilege to defend our country. My father was almost as pleased as I was to think that at last I should have an opportunity of proving my worth in an arena wider than that afforded by the barrack-square. He looked forward with pride to welcoming me

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home in three months' time, when we should have taught our presumptuous foes the lesson they so badly needed. My mother, on the other hand, after the manner of her sex, was inclined to be pessimistic and fearful of consequences. She could not bear to think that I was exposing myself to danger, and, with a view to minimising the risk as much as possible, managed through her influence with the authorities at the War Office to obtain employment for me on the staff of that famous British officer, Colonel—afterwards General Sir Claud—Garvell.

General Garvell (as he soon became), a man of whom all his fellow-countrymen spoke in terms of the most eloquent eulogy, before he landed at Capetown, was a soldier of the oldfashioned type. It was ever his implicit belief that Providence fought on the side of the best-fed battalions, and the talent he displayed in the management of commissariat almost amounted to genius. The troops under his command, as he often observed with very pardonable pride, never suffered

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from hunger or thirst. Such mobility as they may have lacked was amply compensated for by the presence of that well-equipped canteen with which, by his express orders, each corps was invariably provided. He was consequently one of the most popular officers in the British Army, and the rank and file would have followed him anywhere, confident that, whatever else might happen, the transport waggons containing the day's rations would never be left behind.

At the famous battle of Sluitfontein, however, he had the misfortune to make a slight strategical error which cost him the loss of a brigade of infantry and eight guns, and was the subject of one of those masterly despatches (afterwards published in book form) which usually began with the words "I regret to report."*

General Garvell was immediately promoted to a high position of trust at Stellenstein, where his talents for organisation found full scope and gained him the

*From Capetown to Stellenstein; the Record of a Three Months' Trek, by Major General Sir Claud Gravell, K.C.V.O., C.B., D.S.O. (Drake & Jessop, London Price 30/- net.

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respect and devotion of either member of that Military Staff which he there controlled so ably. This would not perhaps be an inopportune moment to give an example of my chief's scrupulous conscientiousness in the exercise of his duty. I therefore take the liberty of quoting, by permission, the letter he wrote to the officer Commanding the District, on the assumption of his new post at Stellenstein. It is, I think, not only expressive of the man himself, but also typical of the workings of a certain very prevalent type of military mind.

“From the Commandant, Stellenstein,

To the G.O.C. Western District.

Sir:

Sept. 24th
Commandt.
Stellenst.

As I have already had the honour to report by telegraph (K. 348), I have this day taken over the duties of my command, as per margin, as per your letter 17/7/00. Prior to my arrival here the con-

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dition of things appears to have been far from satisfactory. I found that no regular system of routine had been established, and that neither "Reveillé" nor "Retreat" were sounded at the hours laid down in the Regulations.

Q. R. para.
927.

The working of the railway here is most casual. On my suggesting to the Railway Staff Officer that trains could be run at five-minute intervals, as they are upon the District Railway at home, and transport thereby much accelerated, he appeared to be amused, and made some irrelevant remark to the effect that he had worked on the Soudan Railway for three years. I am at a loss to understand how discipline, the bedrock of military efficiency, is to be preserved if junior officers adopt such an attitude towards their superiors, merely on the grounds of a certain purely technical knowledge of locomotives and luggage-trains. As Napoleon observed: "The Man is everything; men"—and he would now no doubt have added "and trains"—"are nothing."

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No spurs.

Dress Regulations,
para. 59.

On my arrival I at once proceeded to the railway depot, where I observed a passenger-train standing stationary beside the departure platform. I sent for the Railway Staff Officer, whom I found to be improperly dressed, as per margin. I asked him why he was not wearing spurs, in accordance with the regulations, and he answered most impertinently that the engines were not particularly restive this morning. I reprimanded him severely, warning him that I should most certainly have placed him under arrest, in accordance with Section 5, Sub. section 3 of the Army Act, but for the fact that he was not wearing a sword, and that since I could not therefore deprive him of that weapon, nobody would know whether he were under arrest or not. Also because in his absence there would be no one able to control the working of the railway.

I enquired further of the Railway Staff Officer as to why the train standing in the station was not immediately despatched, without more waste of time, upon its

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journey. He replied that the line was not clear. All I can say is that he took no steps to clear it.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

CLAUD GARVELL, Gen.;
Commdt., Stellenstein."

I shared the honourable exile—if it may be so called—of my chief, but soon found the peaceful Stellenstein existence even more monotonous than my former life "on trek."

My duties as aide-de-camp had never been very responsible or arduous, consisting for the most part in keeping the General well supplied with ice and mineral waters, a task of which I had long grown weary. Indeed, the only occasion on which I felt that I was doing something of real use to the Empire was just before the battle of Sluitfontein, when General Garvell made me the bearer of an important despatch which delayed the

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advance of the troops for several hours. This communication took the form of a stinging memorandum, addressed to the officer commanding the Queen's Own Border Fusiliers, in which the General pointed out that several of the noncommissioned officers of that famous regiment had omitted to polish the buttons of their tunics before going into action, and called attention to the unsoldierly manner in which the men's boots were in many instances fastened with string, instead of with the porpoise-hide boot-laces laid down by regulation. The reply which I brought back to my chief from the Commanding Officer of the Fusiliers was very rightly returned unread, being improperly written on white (instead of blue) paper, and, moreover, lacking that two-inch margin without which no military document is acceptable to those in authority.

I confess that I had soon tired of my position on the General Staff, and was anxiously seeking an opportunity for escape, when Providence thoughtfully supplied me with the necessary excuse. Two

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years before the close of the war, therefore, when General Garvell was invalided home with an enlarged liver, I was fortunate in being the victim of a slight attack of malaria which supplied me with a suitable reason for accompanying my chief to England.

I attended the great function at Dover at which the General was presented by the Mayor with a "sword of honour" and an illuminated address, and shared in his triumphal entry into London. A year later I stood in the window of the flat in the Edgware Road, where my chief resided with his mother, when the entire north end of that thoroughfare was decorated in General Garvell's honour on "Sluitfontein night," as the anniversary was called. I was also present on the following Sunday afternoon, when Mrs. Garvell appeared in a box at the Albert Hall and the whole audience rose and cheered for several minutes. It was I who enjoyed the privilege of supporting the tottering form of the dear old lady, who had long reached and passed the

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grand climacteric, when she acknowledged this public tribute to her son's fame with becoming modesty, and there were tears in my eyes as I sank back into a red plush seat and prepared to listen to the unique concert at which Madame Patti was bidding farewell to the public for the twenty-seventh time.

In due course General Garvell received the knighthood which he so thoroughly deserved, and at the same time the services of his humble aide-de-camp were not left unrewarded by a grateful country. In one of the earliest Gazettes I found myself decorated for "distinguished service in the field," and the South African medal (with one clasp) and the Jubilee Medal already upon my chest were supplemented by yet a third. Later on, when I earned a Coronation medal, and, after a royal function at the Imperial Institute, was made a Member of the Victorian Order (Fourth Class), my breast became absolutely congested with decorations and my cup of happiness was, as may be imagined, well-nigh full.

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As I look back upon the time spent in South Africa I see very clearly what a great deal of grossly inaccurate nonsense has been written, by poets and other irresponsible persons, on the subject of War. Of pride and pomp and circumstance I saw little or nothing during my sojourn on the veldt, and I cannot help agreeing with my friend Hazelton who pithily defined active service as "many months of extreme boredom, punctuated by occasional moments of intense fear."

From one point of view, however, I never had cause to regret the South African War. The hardships of campaigning gave me reason to appreciate more fully than ever the comforts of civilisation and the joys of living at home and in England. I had not hitherto been much of a "society man," preferring to spend my evenings at Bellinger House with my family, or perhaps in a stall at the Gaiety with Hazelton. But the warmth of the welcome awaiting the returning soldier forced me to take an entirely new view of those social functions which form so large

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a part of the Londoner's life, and I gradually found myself becoming one of the most fashionable young men about town. My ignorance of the ways of smart society was not, however, without its drawbacks, and on two occasions during the period of my social début I was guilty of solecisms which I still recall with a shudder.

One evening, the old Duchess of Dulchester was advertised to give a ball which the King and Queen intended honouring by their presence. I was duly invited, and, seeing that the hour given on my card was 10.15 ("Small and Late"), determined that my first appearance in royal circles should not be marred by unpunctuality. At twenty minutes past ten I accordingly walked up the steps of Dulchester House, crossed the slip of red carpet that proclaimed the presence of Royalty, and rang the bell.

I was surprised that the door should not be immediately flung open, and wondered if by chance I had come to the wrong house. After a brief delay, how-

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ever, I was admitted by a panting menial, and presently three or four more domestics hastily appeared upon the scene and relieved me of my hat and coat, at the same time giving me a ticket bearing the number 32. I welcomed this as a sign that at least thirty-one men had arrived before me, but could not help feeling that there was something wrong from the more than usually patronising expression upon the butler's face. With some natural diffidence I politely enquired of this personage whether I were not right in supposing that the Duchess was giving a dance that night. The butler smiled in rather a superior manner and answered that my surmise was perfectly correct. He added, however, that Her Grace was also entertaining some sixty guests at dinner, and that the gentlemen had not yet left the dining-room. I hastily resumed my coat and hat and went for a walk. After sauntering twelve times round the square until I felt that I had roused the worst suspicions in the breast of the policeman at the corner, I returned to Dulchester House.

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I was now glad to find a long string of carriages at the door disgorging their occupants as fast as possible under the patient superintendence of an Inspector of police. I struggled up the front stairs in the midst of a horde of fashionable people, and was just wondering whether I should put on my new pair of white gloves before or after I had shaken hands with my hostess, when the problem was solved by my reaching the top of the stairs and being informed by a servant that the Duchess was at that moment engaged in taking part in a Royal quadrille.

I wormed my way into the ballroom and was happily engaged in watching the edifying spectacle of a number of elderly persons walking solemnly about to music holding each other's hands in a stately but rather anxious manner, when I suddenly realised that I was the only person present in trousers, all the other men being clad in knee-breeches. Alas! I had not been warned of the etiquette which makes it customary for all loyal subjects of the male sex to expose their

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calves to the gaze of their Sovereign. With a guilty sinking of the heart I stole downstairs and made my way home.

The very next night I had been bidden to an evening party (10:30 "French Play") given by the Zeltingers in Portland Place. This time I was determined not to arrive too early. I also looked carefully through the papers in the morning, and in one of them discovered a paragraph which distinctly stated that His Majesty had expressed his intention of attending Lady Zeltinger's soirée, at which a clever troupe of Parisian actors, specially imported for the occasion, would give a representation of that celebrated farce "*Occupe-toi d'Amélie*," followed by a brief *revue* which the Censor had declined to licence elsewhere.

At eleven o'clock, clad in brand-new knee-breeches, I mounted the staircase in Portland Place and was ushered into the drawing-room. I found a large company already assembled there, sitting tightly-packed on small gold chairs listening to as much as they could understand (which

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was luckily but little) of the French play.

My entrance caused a slight interruption, and a few people turned irritably round and said "Sh-sh!", making me feel more than ever conscious of the undraped condition of my legs. My bashfulness was not mitigated by the appalling discovery that my morning paper had been misinformed, and that no member of the Royal Family was present. Once more I found myself conspicuous, this time among a host of trousered fellow-men.

In an agony of selfconsciousness I made my way out of the Zeltingers' drawing-room, and silently crept down the front stairs. On my way down I met two guests, even more belated than myself, who mistook me for the butler (doubtless on account of my legs) and insisted on whispering their names into my reluctant ear. They were much astonished when I brusquely declined to "announce" them.

It was a pity that I had to go home before the *revue* came off, for that was un-

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doubtedly the *clou* of the evening's entertainment. Indeed, the remarks uttered by the heroine, a wellknown artiste from the *Folies Bergères*, were more than once of a nature to cause a ripple to cross that sea of phlegmatic British faces which composed her audience. It was curious, as I was afterwards told, to watch the guests gazing anxiously at one another in a wild endeavour to find out whether it were safe to laugh at jokes which would not have been tolerated in English in any decent smoking-room.

Although my existence for the next two years may be said to have been nothing more nor less than a constant round of pleasure and social gaiety, it must not be imagined that the serious issues of life were altogether neglected or forgotten. After the experience of freedom and interest acquired on active service in South Africa, soldiering at home seemed more than usually dull and futile. With the consent, therefore, of my father, I decided to resign my commission in the army and seek for fame in that wider political

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sphere in which his influence was still to be felt.

With this laudable end in view, I approached the official agents of that political party with which I was least in disagreement, and was fortunate enough to obtain permission to contest the old Northamptonshire division of Slusham which had long been considered a stronghold of the Conservative party.

This safe Tory seat, as it was then considered, had become vacant on the death of that staunch old British squire Sir Isaac Goldman. Sir Isaac had spent many thousands upon the constituency, and his wellknown opposition to anything in the nature of "grandmotherly legislation" ensured for his posters a prominent position in the windows of every public-house in Slusham.

In my efforts to continue the good work so ably initiated by my predecessor, I spared neither myself nor my father's purse. There was not a slate club nor a Christmas goose-fund within a radius of ten miles of Slusham to which I did not

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contribute liberally. I even attended the local football matches, at one of which I was goodnatured enough to allow myself to be persuaded to "kick off." On this occasion I unfortunately missed the ball altogether, and suddenly became the centre of a dense scrum of human beings from which I only managed to extricate myself at the cost of a ruined hat and some considerable loss of dignity.

At the annual Farmers' Dinner I made a great point of "taking the chair." I had been told that the favourite song of the late Member was a patriotic ditty entitled "Soldiers of the Queen," the chorus of which Sir Isaac Goldman rendered, in a voice choked by Imperialistic sentiments and old port, somewhat as follows:

"Zey're zoldiers off der Qveen, mein poys,
'Oo've zeen, mein poys,
'Oo've peen, mein poys," etc.

Following so worthy a precedent, I had lessons from a wellknown professor of singing, who taught me to breathe with that part of my anatomy which I had

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hitherto used solely for purposes of digestion. I was thus enabled to sing "Boys of the Bulldog Breed!" and other national ballads in a manner which gave universal satisfaction. Indeed, one old farmer, who had lost all his teeth—a fact which added to the difficulties of verbal intercourse, since, as Hazelton remarked, one might as well have attempted to converse with a pair of muffled nut-crackers—declared that he had inhabited the parish of Slasham for ninety years, man and boy, come Michaelmas, but had never heard anything to compare with my singing. Such a testimonial was well worth having, the memory of this critic carrying him easily back to the date of Queen Victoria's coronation, an occasion which was fitly celebrated in loyal Slasham by the oiling and repairing of the village pump.

My electioneering campaign proved a lengthy and arduous undertaking, and, I regret to say, ended disastrously both for myself and my party. I was, of course, a political tiro, and had little or no experi-

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ence of platform oratory. When, for instance, at my first meeting, an illmannered person heckled me as to my views upon the Education question, I could only reply that I myself had been educated at Eton and that I thought this a good enough education for anybody. This answer did not seem to satisfy my interrogator, nor indeed any member of my audience. My opponent, on the other hand, whose name was Ezra Huish, was a dissenting lawyer with a large practice at the bar and a gift of eloquence which enabled him to speak with fluency upon any subject at a moment's notice. It ill befits me to say anything derogatory of a political adversary, but I am not divulging a secret when I state that Mr. Huish had no pretensions to being a gentleman. He was, I am ashamed to state, the son of a cash chemist who lived at Northampton. I give him credit for the fact that he made no attempt to conceal the truth about his birth. It is therefore all the more remarkable that this fact should not have prejudiced him more than it did in

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the eyes of those of his constituents who, like myself, desired that the destinies of Empire should be controlled exclusively by gentlemen. I am not in any way bigoted, and I know that a man cannot be held responsible for the accident of his birth. I realise, too, that many great businesses, railways, banks and other commercial concerns have on occasion been successfully managed by men who sprang from the people. But I feel sure that I am only voicing the unanimous opinion of my class when I say that it is essential for the maintenance of the Constitution that the affairs of Empire should be conducted by *gentlemen* who are prepared to consider the questions of the day with open minds, unbiassed by any kind of commercial or business experience whatsoever.

I endeavoured to carry on my campaign in an upright and straightforward manner, thereby disappointing many of the humbler electors who had been accustomed to the somewhat hazardous financial methods of Sir Isaac Goldman. My op-

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ponent, however, though luckily not rich enough to resort to actual bribery, adopted a more dubious course. Indeed, he did not hesitate to flatter the ignorant electors with promises of Old Age Pensions, Small Holdings, schemes for the Better Housing of the Poor and other social reforms of those various impractical kinds which only Radical governments attempt to impose upon the inhabitants of a free country.

Mr. Huish was what we should nowadays term a Socialist; that is to say he thought it an anomaly that a small section of the population of England should be living in luxury and plenty while millions of their poorer brethren starved in the slums. Such views seem, of course, ridiculous to men of birth and wealth who have studied the rudiments of political economy and realise how greatly to the people's advantage is the existence of multi-millionaires. But to the poor and uneducated arguments of a revolutionary kind must ever appeal, and I have no doubt that a large number of the unem-

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ployed artisans of Slasham, who were always on the verge of starvation, were tempted by the inflammatory speeches of my opponent to grudge the splendour in which most of their wealthier neighbours dwelt.

Mr. Ezra Huish pandered to the lowest passions of the mob. He aired his socialistic opinions freely at the expense of the aristocracy, accusing them not only of indolence but even of intellectual incompetence. (How misinformed was my opponent I pointed out in a letter to the *Tylesworth Herald* in which I published a list of the peers and other titled personages who figured with prominence upon the prospectuses of various City Companies. Many of these men, though quite unknown to the general public or even to their fellows in the House of Lords, were nevertheless doing their work silently and laboriously at monthly Board Meetings, earning their guineas and the respect of all those financiers who had induced them to lend their names and talents to the promotion of those

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great business concerns upon whose directorate they sat.) Not only, as I say, did Mr. Huish level the most gross personal attacks against myself and my family and class, but in his passion to display me as unworthy to represent the electors of Slasham, he even made use of weapons which I can only describe as dishonourable and un-English. Not content with raking up the old Saltingborough Scandal of which my poor father had been the innocent victim, he descended so low in his campaign of bitterness and vituperation as to recount upon a public platform one of the few unfortunate incidents of my own otherwise blameless past—an incident which all decentminded persons had long forgotten. The facts of the case were as follows: Soon after I entered the army I was unlucky enough to become entangled with a young person who, although (as she assured me) the daughter of a country clergyman, added to her parent's precarious income by earning a small salary in the second row of the chorus of a Musical Comedy. To cut a

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long story short, my dear father eventually paid this lady a large sum of money to stay those proceedings for Breach of Promise by which I was threatened, and I was thus not compelled to contract the unsuitable matrimonial alliance which at one time seemed to be the only honourable solution of the difficulty. An accident of this sort may happen to any young man who is by nature warmhearted and sentimental, and my friends in society never, I am sure, thought any the worse of me on that account. But at Slasham, where views upon morality were provincial and bigoted, the exaggerated reports of my early romance caused me the loss of a large number of votes, not only among the Nonconformists, which I should not have minded so much, but actually among voters of my own religious persuasion. This naturally helped to turn the scale in the favour of my opponent and added to the difficulties of my campaign.

When I started out upon a parliamentary career I confess that my knowledge of political questions was somewhat vague.

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I had of course been brought up in a decent Conservative household, and was aware that the Conservative party enjoyed a monopoly of patriotism, of religion, of morality and good taste. I knew too that Radicals were mostly individuals of a kind that one was never likely to meet in society—second-class persons, working men, even dissenters—whom one pities rather than despises. I had been taught during the South African War that a vote given to any Liberal Candidate meant a vote given to the Boers, but I had not yet discovered—what we have all learnt to-day—that a vote given to the Radicals is a vote given to the German Emperor. The Liberals were not then, as of course they now are, actively in league with Germany, and anxious to hand themselves and the Empire over to the Kaiser.

I had never been able to devote much time to the study of Imperial concerns, being generally too busy to attend to any but my own private affairs, though from time to time I had glanced at the brief daily summary of parliamentary proceed-

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ings furnished by the halfpenny papers. My grandfather and father before me had both been Conservatives, and I rightly felt that whatever satisfied them was more than good enough for me. Lord Belling-er was a particularly staunch partisan. I remember once, in my youth, praising in his presence a man named Williams whom I had met casually at a London dinner party. In conversation, appearance and manner, Williams seemed to me a most charming and intellectual person, and I told my father that I hoped to make his closer acquaintance.

"Williams?" replied my father. "Williams? Isn't he that Radical fellow?"

His voice trembled with very natural scorn and indignation, and I could only hang my head in silence at the reproof implied by his tone. I borrowed a copy of "Who's Who," later on, and discovered that my father had been right: the man was a Radical. I blush even now with shame to think how nearly I came to being led by a plausible manner into believing Williams to have been a

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gentleman. It was an unpardonable mistake, but one that I have never repeated. A little care should always enable one to tell a man's politics by his appearance. Since I studied the question I have noticed that Conservatives adopt an air of honest, easy, complacent self-assurance which, combined with wellfitting clothes, may be said to be the mark of the true gentleman. Radicals, on the other hand, do not seem to care how badly they dress—I have actually seen one at a theatre in evening clothes and a *black* tie!—and though occasionally some of them patronise decent tailors and thereby pose as being better than they are, the cloven hoof and the hairy heel are generally visible, and I at any rate am never taken in by their pseudo-gentility.

Once or twice foreigners or other ignorant persons have enquired of me whether I were a Conservative or a Liberal. My answer has invariably been the same. "Sir," I have said, "I am an English gentleman who has the welfare of his country at heart. I do not desire to wit-

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ness the upheaval of the Constitution, the downfall of the Throne, the ruin of England's industries, the disbanding of her army, the breakup of her Poor Law. I am, in my humble way, a patriot. I leave it to you to conjecture what my politics must be." In nine cases out of ten my interrogator has guessed correctly that I am a Conservative, content to live up to the family traditions and if possible plant my steps in the footprints which my father has marked so deeply in the sands of the parliamentary seashore.

At the time of which I write the great Fiscal controversy was in its infancy, and although my great-grandfather had been a Lancashire man and a Free Trader, my father, as I have already stated, became converted to Tariff Reform in his dotage, and was never tired of clamouring for a high protective duty upon everything except hops. My mother, on the other hand, who frequently disagreed with her husband upon minor matters, was a disciple of Richard Cobden. I remember her assuring me with tears in her eyes

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that it was infinitely preferable that, under Free Trade, food should be cheap and the working man have no money wherewith to buy it, than that he should possess wages with which, under Protection, it would be impossible for him to purchase expensive food.

I considered the question carefully for nearly a whole week and finally came to the conclusion that I should be acting not only wisely but also in accordance with my principles if I followed the example of my father and advocated the cause of Protection. I had always shared my parent's hatred of taxation. I agreed and still agree with those famous words of his which occur in the celebrated speech he delivered at Basingstoke more than half a century ago: "All taxes are bad," he said, "but if they must be paid at all, it seems to me to be imperative, nay essential, that they should be paid by the foreigner and not by Englishmen!"

A great many solutions of the Fiscal Question have been suggested at different times. To me the whole affair seems sim-

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ple in the extreme. My idea has always been to erect round the coasts of Great Britain a tariff wall high enough to keep out all foreign commercial rivals—thus providing Britons with more employment and higher wages—and yet not so high as to prevent the entry of sufficient imports to give the country the necessary revenue and thus relieve the native of the burden of taxation. This sounds a reasonable plan, I should have thought, and yet I have found the greatest difficulty in impressing its beauties and benefits upon my Free Trade constituents.

As though to confirm my own Protectionist views and assist me in the prosecution of my political campaign, an admirable example of the disadvantages attendant upon Free Trade arose within the very limits of my Northamptonshire constituency. I need hardly say that I lost no opportunity of making good use of this in my election speeches.

Two miles from the town of Slusham stands the huge Reformatory for Youthful Criminals known as the Swableigh

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Institute. Here some five or six hundred boys and youths, convicted of theft, arson, petty larceny or incorrigible truancy, are trained to become decent citizens, soldiers, sailors, and even (in four cases) members of Parliament. That the education they receive is all that can be desired may be gathered from the fact that among "old Swableigh boys" may be numbered no less than two peers and fifteen Company Promoters, one of whom has recently attained the dignity of a Privy Councillor.

For many years the Swableigh Institute was famous for the manufacture of tables and chairs, and, as a result of this industry, the Reformatory was a thriving concern, paying over six per cent. to the shareholders. A short time before my campaign at Slusham, however, the sudden importation of machine-made furniture from Norway gave rise to such keen competition that Swableigh was compelled to cut its prices and eventually to capitulate before the local furniture dealers. For some reason or other, which

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I have never been able to discover, the Norwegian merchant was able to manufacture rough machine-made sections of chairs and tables and place them upon the English market at a price lower than the actual cost of the Englishman's raw materials. The result was, of course, fatal to British trade. The working classes of this country, whose sense of patriotism is but latent, if it exists at all, declined to emulate the methods of their foreign confrères by accepting smaller wages and living largely upon horseflesh,—which, though perhaps an unpleasant form of food, is by no means uneatable—and black bread which (as I gather from a Conservative newspaper) is considered a luxury by members of our Royal family—nor were they willing to pay more than was absolutely necessary for any article. They consequently bought nothing but cheap chairs and tables made by the English dealers from the rough-shaped Norwegian sections, and the once thriving industry of Swableigh waned and finally expired altogether.

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It used to make me very sad, when I went over the Reformatory on the occasion of the annual Visitors' Inspection—I was one of the original Directors of the concern—to see that crowd of healthy happy little criminals drilling on the parade-ground or playing in the recreation field, and realise that, but for the fatuous and burdensome policy of Free Trade under which we groan and suffer, each one of those six hundred lads might easily have been provided with at least two hours more work a day. It was indeed shocking to contemplate the amount of time wasted upon physical drill or hockey which might otherwise have been devoted to honest industry of the kind which would provide the shareholders with a satisfactory dividend.

When, however, I tried to point out the grievous injustice of all this to my electors I was chilled by their total lack of sympathy. Though I explained at some length how, by putting a thumping tax on Norwegian imports, the Swableigh Institute would once more become a humming

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hive of industry, supplying its directors with a suitable salary, instead of being, as it now is, a mere training-ground and school, my constituents listened to my appeal respectfully but without apparent emotion. It was not until the election had been fought and lost that I discovered the cause of their apathy. It was then too late to feel anything but acute disappointment in my countrymen.

The selfishness of the labouring man—of which I have already had occasion to complain—is only one degree less lamentable than that fatal disinclination for work which he perpetually evinces. I have sometimes stood for more than an hour at a stretch at my library window watching the gardeners at work, and wondering why great strong men were not ashamed to spend the precious time so unprofitably. The leisurely way in which they plant bulbs or tickle the paths with a rake makes me despair for the future of England. I believe the working man would sooner do nothing at all than dig in a flower bed or cart manure. He

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has no conception of the dignity of labour; he takes no interest in work for work's sake. It is not only in the country that we find this apathy. Even in London I remember, when the road was being repaved outside Bellinger House, I used to be amazed at the laziness of the workmen—I could see them from my room as I breakfasted in bed—and I even wrote to the County Council to complain, but without much result.

The selfishness of the working man—to repeat myself—who prefers to buy his goods in the cheapest market rather than benefit the Empire by living less well and more expensively, is symptomatic not only of the lower classes but also, I regret to say, of the lower middle-class. Slasham has always been the centre of a large section of the furniture trade, each dealer in the town employing a great many hands in the conduct of his business. At one time, when the Swableigh Institute was at the zenith of its fame, these dealers found themselves unable to compete with the output of the Reformatory,

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where labour was, of course, exceptionally cheap. Their profits had accordingly showed signs of diminution, if not of complete disappearance, when the first cargo of Norwegian woodwork reached these shores. The advent of the foreigner's material caused a startling and unexpected change. The Slasham dealers were now able to import the half-made articles for themselves—in some cases making a few unimportant alterations or additions, so as to render them more suitable for home consumption—and after assembling the various pieces, retail the furniture at an enhanced price to the simple countryfolk of England. In this way they were able to compete as middlemen with the Reformatory and make a substantial profit.

The lack of public spirit shown in such a transaction is almost unbelievable. I should not myself have given the most bankrupt dealer credit for such a display of unpatriotism, had I not been supplied with ample evidence to prove the truth of my assertions. After this it was but a

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mild shock to hear the small farmer declare that he could see no possible advantage to himself in any policy of Colonial Preference. If the vote of the elector is to depend upon personal or financial considerations, the future outlook of England is indeed a gloomy one and the disruption of the Empire cannot long be deferred.

The Slusham by-election came to a close on a Friday evening in June. Owing partly to the fact that Mr. Huish had been nursing the constituency for years, and partly, as I have explained, to the extraordinary wrongheadedness of the electors, the poll resulted in a majority of over 1,200 votes in favour of my opponent. As the seat had been held by Conservatives ever since 1832, this was a severe blow both to my pride and to the cause for which I laboured. To say that I suffered disappointment would be to express in too mild terms the exact state of my feelings. After the way I had lavished time and money upon the electors of Slusham, the small measure of support

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afforded to me was little short of a personal affront. I have, however, long ceased to expect gratitude from the lower classes, and if they preferred to be represented in Parliament by a man who, however able, was the son of a cash chemist, it was no business of mine to question their right of selection, though I might and did doubt the wisdom of their choice.

I did not, however, allow myself to be too greatly overwhelmed by my defeat. I determined to look only upon the bright side, and put away all despairing thoughts as to the pigheadedness of the electors. Hazelton cheered me up a good deal by his sympathy and counsel. "Let the silly beggars stew in their own juice!" he observed very wisely on the evening of the declaration of the poll.

This political defeat, coming as it did at a critical moment in the life of my party, evoked an outburst of offensive triumph in the Radical Press, and proved a severe shock to the Conservative leaders. One of them, indeed, was so tactless as to show his petty irritation by cutting

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me in St. James's Street on the day following the by-election. The fact that all Conservatives were not so narrowminded as to attribute my defeat to personal causes was shortly made clear by my election to the Carlton Club, and, sore though I was at my failure, it was pleasant to realise that I was not to be held entirely responsible for the turning tide of Radicalism which was so soon to swamp and demoralise the country.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOREIGN TRAVEL.

THE electoral campaign proved, as might have been expected, a severe strain upon my constitution, and it was some time before I recovered my usual spirits. The family doctor whom I prudently consulted prescribed complete rest and change, and suggested that a sea voyage (combined with a strong tonic) might set me on my legs again. Acting on this advice I decided to travel abroad for some months and thus recuperate my exhausted body and at the same time, if possible, still further enlarge my mind.

My father had always been very anxious that I should become better acquainted with Greater Britain, and, as he kindly volunteered to pay all my travelling expenses, I was only too ready to fall in with his ideas. I had long desired an opportunity of visiting our Colonies—those vast territories beyond the seas which we are

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so proud to possess, whose inhabitants we regard with such affectionate superiority, and who look upon the Motherland with a contempt which is too kindly to prevent them from allowing her the privilege of defraying the cost of their maritime defence.

It was at this period of his life that my friend Ginger Hazelton became foolishly entangled with a married woman named Mrs. Carter-Pickford, and attempted to extricate himself in a fashion that could only end in disaster. The feeling against him in society was so strong that he thought it wise to leave the country for a time until the scandal had blown over. I was thus fortunate enough to be able to inspire him with an interest in the Empire, and had little difficulty in inducing him to accompany me upon my journey.

Before giving an account of our foreign tour I may as well say something on the subject of the affair which caused Hazelton to leave England so readily.

Mrs. Carter-Pickford, the lady who

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was at once the cause and the victim of this unfortunate scandal, was a fluffy little person with large blue eyes and small white hands. She had married George Carter-Pickford, a wealthy but tiresome stockbroker, for the reasons that so many girls marry such men. He was extremely rich, and she was terribly tired of her mother's society. The latter, Mrs. Rossiter by name, was the widow of an Indian judge and lived at Camberley—a region that is much infested by retired Civil servants in every stage of senile decay—in a small stucco villa called “Mayview Lodge,” with a semicircular carriage-drive lined by a dozen rather grimy laurel bushes. Amid such depressing surroundings Grace Rossiter led a dull existence, and it was with feelings of relief rather than joy that she accepted the proposal of George Carter-Pickford that she should share his name and fortune.

Soon after marriage Grace found that her husband's wealth did not bring her all the happiness she deserved, and, as her mother insisted upon using the Car-

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ter-Pickford house in Eaton Square as an hotel, and spent the greater part of the year as her guest, it sometimes occurred to Grace that she might just as well have remained a spinster at Camberley for all the fun that she was deriving from matrimony. She was consequently in a very dissatisfied frame of mind and what is called "looking for trouble" when she chanced to meet Ginger Hazelton at a concert held at Romford House in aid of Woman's Suffrage. Carter-Pickford was Ginger's stockbroker, and had advised him to invest large sums in South African securities in which he had lost a considerable sum of money. Hazelton, therefore, felt naturally drawn towards Grace, and found a common bond of sympathy in their mutual dislike of Carter-Pickford. They spent a happy half-hour together at Romford House over a loud and prolonged discussion of a recent novel (written by a woman) which was considered so improper that everybody declared it to be unfit to read and the two first editions were sold out on the day of publica-

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tion. So earnest did their argument become that they were quite unaware of the fact that a professional singer, who had kindly volunteered his services in the sacred cause of Woman's Rights, was ploughing his way through a cycle of twenty-seven songs by Brahms. It was only when a lady of title, who had thoughtfully divested herself of most of her garments, gave a dance which the programme euphemistically referred to as "classical" that they began to take an interest in the entertainment. Indeed, their conversation was brought to a sudden close when the distinguished dancer began hurling flowers among the audience with grace and vigour, and a peculiarly fine specimen of the tulip variety caught Ginger a shrewd blow between the eyes. When order had once more been restored they were able to continue their chat, though occasionally interrupted by another strongminded woman who was describing with extraordinary eloquence how she had proved her fitness for the Franchise by biting two wardress-

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es in Holloway Prison where she had been brutally incarcerated in accordance with the man-made law which forbids one to throw an empty bottle at a Cabinet Minister.

That evening, when Grace returned to Eaton Square, she knew that she loved Ginger Hazelton passionately. She at once set to work to win the young soldier's heart, and soon succeeded in stimulating it to an unaccustomed celerity which caused its owner a good deal of pleasurable perturbation. She literally threw herself, in fact, at the head of this susceptible young man, and effectually contrived to turn it without much difficulty. Being of an unreserved and garrulous disposition Grace managed to let the state of her feelings become generally known. And Society, which is instinctively kind to lovers—even though they may be concealing the most amorous of indiscretions behind the burly form of the philosopher Plato—aided and abetted her in every possible way. Wherever Ginger went he was always sure of finding Grace

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Carter-Pickford. At every country house in which he stayed she was included in the list of guests. At London dinner-parties thoughtful hostesses placed them side by side, shaking their heads after they had gone and saying that they really didn't know what the world was coming to.

Ginger was naturally flattered at receiving such marked attention from a decidedly pretty woman, and behaved with less discretion than was perhaps wise. At a ball at Carlton House he sat out five consecutive dances with Grace in the garden, and when they returned to the ball-room it was observed that he had forgotten to brush his shoulder. Again, at a water-party at Taplow, Grace and he got lost in the woods together, and did not return home until long after midnight, when they had to be let in by the night-watchman. The explanation with which they subsequently furnished an indignant hostess, to the effect that they had mislaid their punt-pole and been forced to walk home from Pangbourne, was re-

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ceived with the icy and incredulous silence which it deserved.

On Grace's twenty-sixth birthday Ginger, with that originality of mind for which soldiers have long been famous, presented her with a copy of Fitzgerald's translation of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. On the flyleaf of this book he was inspired to write a few lines stating that if only she were singing at his side and he were allowed a little light refreshment, a wilderness would be enough for him. Grace had no ear for music and was never allowed to sing at home. Any vocal exercises which she might have performed in a wilderness or elsewhere would probably have proved more than enough for most men. She was, however, much touched by the kindly if inappropriate quotation, but would have been less flattered had she realised that Ginger had already inscribed the very same words on two former occasions in giftbooks which were now reposing on the shelves of other women.

Grace Carter-Pickford was what is

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known as a "sweet woman." In her efforts to please Ginger she became more saccharine than ever, until even he, sweet-tooth though he was, grew conscious of a rising feeling of mental nausea which her archness only served to accentuate. Her sweetness expressed itself in various forms, some of which Ginger, who was a selfconscious young man, found far from palatable. She displayed her affection for him openly in front of his friends, and would address him in endearing terms in public places in a fashion that made him painfully shy. She hated letting him out of her sight, would question him rigorously as to his movements, and made him account to her for every moment of the day spent away from her side. Finally, she acquired the habit of tenderly ruffling his hair—a thing that he particularly loathed. The climax was reached, however, when she appeared in his rooms in Jermyn Street one evening and implored him to elope with her to Paris. Ginger was a very obliging young man, but the prospect did not appeal to him. He was

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already heavily in debt to various tradesmen; he had dinner engagements which would make it inconvenient to leave London until the end of July; and he knew that £600 a year was scarcely a sufficient income upon which to support another man's wife in Paris.

His obvious reluctance proved a serious shock to Mrs. Carter-Pickford, and when she had economically suggested Switzerland as a compromise and he still seemed disinclined to fall in with her views or let her make what is called an honest man of him, she was cut to the quick. She told him angrily that he was just like every other man, and was very much annoyed when he replied that he had never considered himself a freak. She even threatened to take the veil and retire permanently into a convent near Strathpeffer which she had heard of as being comfortable, with an excellent cuisine, but Ginger was able to dissuade her from taking so extreme a step. Instead, she returned to Eaton Square and confessed to her husband, who was almost

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as angry with Ginger as she had been, saying that he had certainly not behaved like a gentleman, and refusing to undertake any more of his financial transactions in the City.

Hazelton, thus deprived at one fell swoop of both love and stockbroker, retired from active society life for a time and agreed to join me on my Colonial tour.

In the short time at our disposal it was impracticable to contemplate a visit to more than one of Great Britain's Oversea possessions. We determined therefore to confine our attention to "Our Lady of the Snows," as the Dominion of Canada has been somewhat erroneously termed by our greatest living English poet. Hazelton and I were both good sailors, as we had often proved while crossing the Channel on our way to spend a few days together at Ostend or in Paris. We consequently made up our minds to travel in a leisurely fashion across the Atlantic, and on a fine afternoon in July left Liverpool on board the Hudson Transport

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Company's S.S. *Elysian*, which was not timed to arrive in Quebec for at least ten days.

Our sea-voyage was quite uneventful, but not uninteresting. My experience of ocean travelling had, as I have said, hitherto been confined to numerous passages of the Channel, and I spent part of the first day on the *Elysian* discussing the science of navigation with a uniformed official whom I took to be the captain but afterwards discovered to be the deck-steward. We had a concert in the first class saloon one night, when Hazelton distinguished himself by singing "Grandma's teeth are plugged with zinc" and other humorous songs, notably perhaps two parodies entitled "The Devout Plover" and "Oh, dry those ears!" A Presbyterian minister who chanced to be on board insisted on giving what he called a "Reading from Charles Dickens" which lasted for over forty minutes and was quite inaudible. He also conducted a still lengthier service on the Sunday, at which however I found myself unable to be present.

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Our fellow-passengers were a deplorably dull collection of human beings, and experience has since taught me that persons who cross the ocean are as a rule exceedingly second-rate and tiresome. I have indeed sometimes gone so far as to wonder, on reading the account of a passenger steamer being lost with all on board, whether such a tragedy were not a merciful dispensation of Providence whereby the world is occasionally disembarrassed of some of its least agreeable inhabitants.

For the sake of economy Hazelton and I travelled without our servants, thereby suffering all the inconveniences consequent upon such a sacrifice. When the moment came for packing our trunks we found ourselves particularly handicapped by the absence of domestics. My man Gregson was one of those excellent valets to whom packing is more of an art than a duty. My own attempts to emulate his example, though much less complicated in their method, were not nearly so successful in their results. My plan, indeed,

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consisted of thrusting all my clothes pell-mell into their boxes, and relying upon Providence to find room for them there. In this, as I fear in many other matters, Providence often failed to justify my confidence. "If you want a thing well done, do it yourself," is an adage I have often heard extolled, unjustifiably, I think, since it is nowadays generally admitted that if you want a thing well done it is far better to employ an expert to do it for you. Before I left England my two portmanteaux had been so neatly and dexterously filled by my valet that there was room and to spare for all my clothes. After ten days on board ship, when I attempted to repack, my wardrobe seemed to have expanded to such an extent that I had the greatest difficulty in getting it into my trunks at all. By dint of jumping up and down for some time on the lid of my second portmanteau I managed at last to turn the key in the lock, and it was not until I had strapped it up that I found I had forgotten to include my pyjamas and slippers. My dressing-case had been

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comparatively empty when I started, but its contents swelled so during the voyage that I could find no room for my hair-brushes, and in trying to shut the bag I broke a bottle of Brilliantine over my sponge. The problem of making the less contain the greater, which had puzzled Euclid many years ago, occupied my thoughts very frequently during the last hours spent on the *Elysian*, and it was in a hectic condition of mind and body that I joined Hazelton on deck as the steamer came to anchor in the harbour at Quebec.

This volume makes no pretensions to being in any way a guide-book. I do not therefore propose to give any vivid descriptions of the scenery of Canada or the customs of its inhabitants. I shall leave that to abler pens than mine, merely contenting myself with a few personal impressions gathered in the course of a journey from the Atlantic to the Pacific across that broad Dominion which is by no means the most insignificant part of our Imperial heritage.

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Hazelton and I only stayed two days at Quebec. During that brief time, however, we were able to leave our cards upon the Governor-General, who happened to be in residence at the Citadel but for some unexplained reason neglected to invite us to enjoy his renowned hospitality. We also visited the famous Montmorenci Falls, a romantic torrent across which an acrobat was engaged in walking on a tightrope as an advertisement for somebody's pills. We also spent a pleasant afternoon on the Heights of Abraham, and gazed with reverence at the spot where, within a few yards of the new convict prison and in sight of the new small-arms factory, the hero Wolfe "fell victorious."

We left Quebec on a Sunday evening, reaching Ottawa, the capital of the Dominion, on the following day, and at once resumed our journey in that comfortable Canadian Pacific Railway train which was destined to carry us as far West as Vancouver.

The scenery at which Hazelton and I

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gazed from the window of our "drawing-room"—as the section containing two sleeping-berths is called—during the first day of our journey West, was picturesque but monotonous. Mile after mile of well-wooded, wellwatered country, reminiscent of the south of Ireland, with no sign of animal life to vary the dead level of similarity, passed before our eyes. Hazelton and I were in a merry mood, however, which no scenic monotony could dispel. Towards five o'clock my companion declared jocosely that he had seen a bird. He refused to disclose any further information upon the subject but, on being pressed, stated that, as a matter of fact, he had also noticed, about an hour ago, what appeared to him to be the footprints of a bear in the sand at the edge of the railway line. In that humorous fashion for which I may confess without boasting that I have always been noted, I warned him that anything he might say would be taken down, altered, and used in evidence against him. The following amusing cross-examination, which perhaps shows

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what a delightfully frivolous frame of mind we were in, ensued:

I. "What did you do on seeing the bear-tracks?

H. Nothing.

I. Had you been drinking?

H. No.

I. Why not?

H. Because at that time I hadn't seen the bear-tracks."

How funny we were, and how we laughed!

The only things of interest that I myself observed were large numbers of lily-pads growing along the line. Lily-pads, as I explained to Hazelton, form the favourite if not the staple food of the moose. My friend denied this, however, saying that it was well known that moose subsisted exclusively upon the bark of trees. Hence the Canadian sport of "moose-calling" in which the Indians are so skilled. The sportsman (Hazelton assured me) conceals himself in a wood and gives vent to a peculiar cry towards which the moose, mistaking it for the bark upon

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which it loves to browse, hastens with an expectant air. On arriving within a few yards of the hunter the confiding animal is blown up with a shot-gun, and the day's sport comes to an end. The mysteries of Nature are indeed strange.

The train bore us smoothly along, day and night, hour after hour, past Winnipeg, Regina and Calgary, until at last we traversed the widespread Rocky Mountains, and finally reached the little town of Vancouver. The contrast between the bare and desolate prairie round Regina and the rich undulating landscape which gladdened our eye directly we crossed the Bow River was very startling. Still more startling was the sudden appearance of that stupendous range of hills beneath whose shadow Calgary nestles. Looking at those great stretches of Canadian prairie one is almost tempted to think that at the Creation of the World Providence suffered from some sort of temporary mental aphasia while this part of the country was in process of being manufactured. After five or six hundred miles of

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Providential inaction a twinge of conscience seems to have supervened, and the creation of that wonderful country which surrounds the Rockies has all the appearance of a tardy attempt to make amends.

It was soon after leaving Regina that we came upon our first prairie fire, and I must admit that as a spectacle it was most disappointing. The common idea of such a conflagration, as Hazelton justly remarked, is a living mass of flames extending for a thousand miles in every direction, and about a hundred yards high. When the settler sees it approaching his homestead he mounts his fleet mustang, puts his wife on the pommel in front of him, his baby in one pocket and his dog in the other, and gallops day and night across the plains, hotly pursued by the fiery elements. As the flames gradually gain upon him he sacrifices his wife, dog and child, in whatever order his affection or the exigencies of the moment demand, and at last escapes himself by plunging headlong into the foaming rapids of an adjacent torrent. *Our* prairie fire did not

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answer in any particular to this description. It was indeed a ridiculously inadequate affair, and could only have prompted the settler to walk up to it and blow it out.

Within a week of leaving Quebec we arrived in Vancouver. Here we proposed to spend at least ten days and see something of the country. Our plans were, however, sadly frustrated by a tragic occurrence which at once put an end to our brief holiday and (as far as I was concerned) completely spoilt the enjoyment of the trip.

My first thought on settling down in the hotel at Vancouver had been to write an account of my travels to my parents at home. Ever since I was a boy I had always made a point of corresponding regularly with my family whenever we were separated for more than ten days. The composition of my weekly letter was, however, a domestic duty which habit had not yet succeeded in robbing of its tedium. On this particular occasion circumstances conspired to make it a peculiarly disagree-

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able task. The implements with which the wellmeaning Vancouver hotel management supplied its guests for the purposes of caligraphy could hardly be termed pens, save by a severe stretch of the imagination. They were, indeed, as little adapted to the uses of correspondence as are those captive blunt-nosed stubs of wood which telegraph-offices all over the world are in the habit of providing for their long-suffering customers. Three of them were irretrievably cross-nibbed, and the only remaining sound one had a point like a pin. As though to add to my difficulties, the ink was practically useless, the ink-pot being nearly empty, and such liquid as it contained of the consistency of treacle. Hazelton suggested that it had been made by mixing soot and glue and adding a few hairs just to give the stuff a character of its own; whatever the process of its manufacture, the result was deplorably unsuccessful.

Writing letters to the dear ones at home is a tiresome business at the best of times; on this occasion I found it more than

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usually so. But I am not the sort of man to be baffled by trifles—barriers, as Meredith said, are meant to be surmounted—and though inwardly cursing the Management for their neglect, I continued to carve my way laboriously across page after page of the hotel notepaper. I was encouraged and upheld in the accomplishment of this feat by the knowledge that the completion of my selfimposed task would set me free for at least another week; that until the following Sunday I need give no further thought to the dear but distant relatives of whom I had taken farewell with such cheerful fortitude a fortnight ago at Liverpool. I was, in fact, beginning to experience that delightful feeling of ease and independence, so aptly described by the hymnologist as “peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away,” when a telegram was handed to me by one of the hotel servants which put an altogether different complexion upon life. I read it hurriedly through and handed it to Hazelton with a frown.

“We must go home at once, I suppose,” he said as he gave it back.

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"I'm afraid so," I replied.

The cable, which came from my mother, stated that my poor father had been suddenly taken ill and that it was essential that I should return forthwith. This, as may be imagined, was extremely inconvenient. I had already unpacked my clothes, and it would take a long time to pack them up again. Also I had set my heart on spending at least a month or six weeks in Canada, so as to be in a position to write a book upon the country on my return to England. There could be no question, however, of my disobeying so urgent a summons, and Hazelton and I prepared to resume our places in the first east-bound C.P.R. train and hasten home as quickly as possible. In the circumstances, a speedy journey was imperative; we therefore decided to sacrifice our return tickets on the Hudson line and take ship on some swifter American steamer.

Hurriedly packing our trunks as best we might, we hastened back to Ottawa, and thence proceeded to New York. Here we found that we need only spend twenty-

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four hours before embarking upon the SS. *Sardonic* which sailed for Liverpool on the following afternoon.

It has always been a matter of intense regret to me that my stay in Canada was not sufficiently long to enable me to "get behind the native mind," so to speak. My friends have often expressed a wish that I should publish my views on Colonial affairs, but I have always felt a slight hesitation in doing so without some further experience of the Colonies. No doubt I am unique in this respect, a fortnight spent in any part of the world being generally considered a sufficient excuse for a volume of criticism. But in spite of its unfortunate conclusion my visit to Canada was not, I hope, without benefit. My temporary presence in their midst may possibly have shown our cousins across the sea that the Englishman's interest in the Colonies is not exclusively confined to entertaining Colonial visitors at garden-parties in London, where they are privileged to meet a crowd of their own kinsmen, leavened by a few goodnatured

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members of Society haled in to give an air of distinction to what might otherwise develop into a very suburban sort of entertainment. It also enabled me to realise the vastness and fertility of the Empire in a way that nothing short of personal inspection could have done. A leading Canadian statesman whom I met in the train on the way home asked me what I thought of the Dominion. "I shall be glad," I replied, "to tell my friends in England that, so far from being but a few million acres of snow and ice, Canada is a thriving land of promise, a land flowing with milk and honey. They will be no less pleased and astonished to hear that during the whole fortnight I have spent here I have never had occasion to wear the fur-coat and snow-boots which my dear mother insisted upon my bringing. On the contrary, I have seldom suffered so severely from the heat as I have during the last week." The eminent Canadian smiled politely at my remarks, but did not enthuse over my fulsome compliments to the extent which they perhaps deserved. I dare say I was

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equally unenthusiastic when he was good enough to explain to me—what most of his own fellow-countrymen and but few of mine appreciate—how, as he said, “Canada saved the Empire” at the time of the Boer War. It appears from his account, that the thousand or so partially trained Canadians who gallantly volunteered for active service in South Africa, being naturally equipped with all those military qualities which make for success upon the field of battle and which the professional soldier entirely lacks, were enabled so thoroughly to instruct our English regulars in the art and science of war as to ensure a victory for the British arms. It is strange that a fact like this, which is so patent to every loyal Canadian, should somehow have escaped notice in England. I cannot account for it at all.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RETURN.

I SPENT most of our only day in New York in what is called the Rotunda of the Russell House, the hotel where we had made our headquarters. It was at least a week since I had seen a daily newspaper, and I was anxious to learn the news of the world. I therefore found a comfortable chair in the Rotunda and settled down to enjoy a copy of the *New York Newsletter and Brooklyn Bugle* which a waiter had recommended to me as being one of the "livest" papers in the City.

I may have been especially fortunate or the reverse, but the particular copy of the paper that I got hold of contained sixty-seven pages of reading matter, as well as half-a-dozen profusely illustrated Special Supplements, and, life being short, I scarcely felt able to cope with such a vast mass. The Fashion Supplement appeared to be composed exclusively of adver-

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tisements of feminine underwear, illustrated by portraits of eminently respectable but sparsely clad ladies, looking like so many denuded governesses. The Comic Supplement, I admit, was altogether beyond me. "The adventures of Uncle Pike" left me cold. I found little to laugh at in the practical jokes of "Buster Brown." The wiles of "Weary Willie" and the senile cunning of "Foxy Grandpa" did not appeal to me, nor could I understand why every individual character in these illustrations should be depicted as though in the act of exhaling an air-balloon inscribed with humorous ejaculations. Even after deciphering the latter I remained singularly unmoved.

Vainly did I search this amorphous mass of journalistic matter for news of the great outer world, for some account of the General Election, or the Peace Conference, which were then taking place in England and at the Hague. I was finally forced to the mournful conclusion that the American public cared for none of these things, that they were

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not interested in anything that happened without the limits of their own narrow experience. I was not, I suppose, sufficiently conversant with the methods of American journalism to know in what obscure corners of the paper I must seek for foreign intelligence, and, after scanning column after column of sensational news, my eye continually repelled by such headlines as "Society Belle Suicides from Sky-scraper," "Met death in an Automobile," "Trolley-car Turns Turtle," I gave up the search in despair.

The *New York Newsletter and Brooklyn Bugle*, as I afterwards learnt from an American acquaintance, is a paper which everybody abuses and everybody reads. It aims at supplying its patrons with what they want, instead of attempting—like its more sober English contemporaries—the difficult task of educating the popular taste to appreciate something better. Frankly sensational news, served up in a frankly sensational manner, must always appeal to the baser side of human nature, and it is by pandering to the most brutal

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and primitive instincts of its readers that the *Bugle* relies upon an ever-increasing circulation.

There is no doubt that when the average man opens his evening paper to find himself confronted with two parallel columns of print, the one headed "Bimetallism as a Factor in the State" and the other "Babes Butchered by Baltimore Bride," his eye unconsciously selects the latter. He may deplore the publication of revolting details, but that will not prevent him from studying them.

The proprietor of the *Bugle* realised the existence of that love of the squalid which is one of the essential weaknesses of frail humanity, and made of it the solid foundation of a unique journalistic success. The staff of his paper had strict orders to confine their literary talents within certain narrow limits; they were enjoined to refrain from subtlety, to shun paradox, to avoid writing anything which might not at first sight appear intelligible to the meanest mind. The news of the day was thus conveyed to the groundlings

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in a direct, blunt and forcible fashion, which left nothing to the imagination and did not in any way tax the brain. No tragedy, however squalid, was hidden from public view; and foreign correspondents vied with one another in ransacking the police news of their various capitals for deeds of shame and cruelty sufficiently hideous to fill the place of honour upon the front page of the *Bugle*.

This page was entirely devoted to murders, suicides and sudden deaths; it was embellished with portraits of criminals and their victims, and printed in two, and sometimes three, colours—the more bloody the news the more crimson being the ink employed in its dissemination. The reader in search of horrors could thus tell at a glance exactly where to find the tragedies his soul desired, and glut himself to his heart's content without any undue waste of time. So long as he confined his attention to the red ink, he need have no fear of being entrapped into reading a political article or a book review.

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Much of the remainder of the paper was given up to column advertisements of patent "pick-me-ups," quack medicines, liniments, emulsions, hair-restorers and so-called "lung tonics." Grateful patients who had been cured of skin diseases of a peculiarly revolting character described their symptoms with that total lack of reticence which distinguishes the confidences of such individuals. The photographs accompanying these testimonials were little calculated to add to the comfort or gaiety of readers who were fortunate enough not to suffer from any aggressive form of cuticular irritation. Other columns, again, were occupied by puffs of patent breakfast-foods, which no doubt contained a sufficient percentage of alcohol to render them popular with the temperate and abstemious, and brought them within the legitimate reach of all total abstainers.

But the *Bugle* did not appeal exclusively to lovers of sensation, sufferers from eczema, and the advocates of temperance and the Simple Life. It made a special-

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ity of those "personal paragraphs" which figure so conspicuously in modern journalism and give such pleasure to the curious and the busybody. Descriptions of the orgies indulged in by New York's "Four Hundred" were always acceptable to readers who did not happen to be included within that select circle, or who enjoyed imaginative fiction under any guise. And the *Bugle* saw to it that the accounts of society entertainments were composed in a suitably lurid style and with that total disregard of truth which alone makes such "copy" readable.

The law of libel is, it appears, seldom carried into effect in the United States—if indeed it exists—and no one would think it worth the trouble (or expense) to ask a freeborn American judge and jury to convict a man upon so trifling a charge as that of traducing the honour of a friend. This fact does much to lighten the burden of responsibility under which an American editor works, and, in any case, most of the misstatements published by the *Bugle* were of a comparatively

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harmless nature. It arranged matrimonial alliances between New York girls and titled foreigners who had never met one another—prematurely announcing, for example, the forthcoming nuptials of the Grand Duke Isidor and Mrs. Hosmer Vanfarden, before that lady had even attempted to divorce her third husband. In this way it won a wellmerited repute as the recognised purveyor of scandal, the circulator of gossip, the revealer of society secrets. No wonder, then, that it was widely read in the drawing-room as well as on the trolley-car, and that its proprietor was so universally respected that his name figured prominently among those of the candidates to be nominated for the Presidency of the Republic.

Occasionally, it must be admitted, the society reporter of the *Bugle* overstepped the bounds fixed by decency and good taste. For instance, when he maligned the beautiful Miss Ivy Vansittart—a lady of unimpeachable character and charming disposition, who had probably broken more hearts than any other girl in New

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York—by suggesting that she was no better than she should be, the insult raised a storm of indignation in the bosoms of her many beaux. Several of the most chivalrous young men of Newport society even went so far as to declare that they would certainly have gone down to the office of the *Bugle* and punched the proprietor's head, if that gentleman had not been a comparatively elderly man, and so extremely rich.

All this I learnt, as I say, from a chance American acquaintance whom Hazelton had once met at the American Embassy in London and whom we were now fortunate enough to run across in the Rotunda of the Russell House. I was explaining to Mr. Howard P. Kimball, as he was called, that sensational journalism was practically unknown in England, when Hazelton drew my attention to an elderly gentleman who was just entering the Rotunda. In the newcomer I was delighted to recognise Lord Warlingham, whom I had not seen since that day in the train when he had mistaken me for a ventriloquist.

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The eminent peer did not notice us at once. Bearing a large bundle of letters in his hand he crossed hurriedly to the fireplace and rang the bell. As he did so one of the bell-boys of the hotel passed through the room. Lord Warlingham turned to him rather irritably.

"Here, you page!" he said, "Bring me a Bradshaw!"

"Hi! Buttons!" he continued, as the boy prepared to pass on.

Thus addressed, the youth winced perceptibly. He had never been called "Buttons" in the whole course of his life, and, though he did not understand the allusion, probably suspected a veiled insult of some sort against which his proud Republican spirit revolted. Then, seeing that the remark proceeded from one whose side-whiskers proclaimed him to be an Englishman, and who could not therefore be expected to know any better, he decided to treat the remark with the contempt that he no doubt felt it deserved. He gazed scornfully at Lord Warlingham for a moment and then went calmly on his

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way, leaving the old gentleman a prey to the most profound irritation.

"Confound his impudence!" exclaimed Lord Warlingham, as he rang the bell again with a violence which but feebly expressed his indignation.

In a few moments another bell-boy appeared upon the scene bearing a large pitcher of water which he proceeded to place upon the table at Lord Warlingham's side.

"Here! What's this?" asked the latter.

"Ice-water, I guess."

"Take it away! I never ordered it. I wouldn't touch it for the world! What on earth should I want with iced water? Do you think I have no regard for my digestion?"

The bell-boy smiled impudently. "Guess I never studied your digestion any," he remarked.

"Then why do you bring me this ridiculous drink?" asked Lord Warlingham.

"You rang for it, mister, that's why."

"I did not ring for it, you cheeky young scoundrel!" Lord Warlingham was rapidly becoming hectic.

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"No need to get mad, anyway," suggested the youth. "You rang twice, didn't you?"

"Well, and what if I did?"

"That means ice-water."

"Oh, indeed!" replied the peer, assuming his most satirical tone. "Do you pretend to have reduced the science of telepathy to such a point that you can ascertain the requirements of your guests by the manner in which they press the bells?"

"I don't know anything about all that," said the bewildered boy.

"And suppose," continued the other sarcastically, "suppose I happened to have a craving for—what shall we say?—ham or bananas or—"

"Ham and bananners," echoed the boy, scenting an opportunity of escape. "Guess I'd better send a waiter." And in another moment he was gone.

Lord Warlingham gazed helplessly round. He realised no doubt that he was a stranger in a strange and perhaps hostile land, ignorant of the customs, even to

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a great extent of the language, of the country. He was about to ring the bell for the third time when his attention was attracted to the antics of a waiter who had brought a small table to his side and was deftly covering it with a white cloth and a few plates.

"What's all this?" asked Lord Warlingham petulantly, pointing to a large ham and a bunch of bananas which the man was laying reverently before him.

"Your order, sir."

"My order?"

The waiter had no doubt been warned by the bell-boy, and was determined to be patient with the distinguished lunatic.

"Will you take any crackers with the ham?" he enquired politely.

"Crackers! Do you think it's the fifth of November?" Lord Warlingham's thoughts possibly reverted to the days of his extreme youth. What on earth should he want with crackers at his age, he asked himself. Did the man suppose that he was in his second childhood?

The waiter smiled tolerantly at this re-

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markable specimen of English humour, and calmly continued making out the bill in duplicate.

"Will you need the whole ham?" he asked.

Lord Warlingham boiled over. "I don't *need* ham at all!" he almost shouted. He certainly did not look like a man who had a yearning for ham, though his face was rapidly assuming the colour of that favourite dish.

"That'll be two dollars twenty-five," said the other, quite unmoved, as he handed the bill.

"But I tell you, I don't *want* these things!" Lord Warlingham tore the paper up into small fragments and flung them on the floor. "I never ordered them! Can't you understand? Am I the sort of man who would eat bananas and ham just before lunch?"

He looked round once more in a hopeless search for some means of ridding himself of this waiter and his intolerable bananas, when his eye fell upon Hazelton and Mr. Kimball and myself who had

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hitherto been amused spectators of the scene.

There was something so tragic in Lord Warlingham's mute appeal for help that we all three crossed the room together. The old gentleman's face lighted up at the sight of his own countrymen, and after shaking hands warmly with Hazelton and myself and bowing to Mr. Kimball, whom we presented to him, briefly explained the situation.

"Don't you see that the gentleman has no use for bananners?" said Mr. Kimball, addressing the waiter in a peremptory tone.

"But the gentleman ——"

"Say, Adolph, are you looking for trouble, or what? Quit being so fresh, or I'll have you fired!"

The waiter shrugged his shoulders and prepared to retire as gracefully as possible.

"I am extremely grateful, I assure you," Lord Warlingham began, turning to Mr. Kimball with a relieved look, when the waiter had gone.

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"Not at all," said the other, "I saw at once you were a foreigner in distress."

"A foreigner?" Lord Warlingham smiled a superior smile. "Oh no, excuse me, I am an Englishman."

"Same thing over here."

Lord Warlingham gasped. He suddenly saw himself in a quite new and undignified light. To him as to all Englishmen the word "foreigner" had always hitherto implied something un-English and therefore pitiable. It was a shock to realise that anyone should be so misguided as to class him in such a category, and he prepared to deny the imputation. But on second thoughts it occurred to him that perhaps it would be impolite to disagree with a total stranger on a mere matter of taste.

"I suppose you can always tell an Englishman when you see one," he remarked with some natural pride.

"That's so," assented Mr. Kimball, "but I can't tell him much."

Lord Warlingham looked puzzled for a moment, but determined to pursue the subject no further.

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"It is very delightful to meet one's fellow countrymen in a strange place like this," he said turning with a smile to Hazelton and myself. "Quite a chance," he continued, "as I leave for England to-morrow on the *Sardonic*."

"What a coincidence," I replied. "Hazelton and I are sailing on the same boat."

"This is indeed good news. My daughter Aline will be delighted. Ah, here she is," he added, as a good-looking girl came tripping down the main staircase.

I am not superstitious as a rule, but when I looked up and recognised the girl whom I had met in the train at Paddock Green, I realised that this was something more than mere coincidence. This was Fate.

Her father introduced us formally, and we neither of us thought it advisable to make any allusion to our previous acquaintanceship.

Lord Warlingham then proceeded to explain his reasons for being in America in August. He had been sent, so he said,

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as the representative of an influential British Corporation, to confer with fellow delegates from all parts of the world at a commercial congress which was being held in New York. The conference was at an end, and he was returning to England as quickly as possible. The storm and stress of New York life was as little to his fancy as the airless overheated atmosphere of the hotel. He had for so long been accustomed to be treated with deference by those whom he rightly considered his social inferiors that it was a shock to find himself among a people who seemed to know little or nothing of the respect due to an English nobleman. The behaviour of the hotel servants especially, left much to be desired. It was not, as he assured me, that they were rude, so much as indifferent, and then again, they talked a strange language which jarred upon his sensitive ear.

One of them approached at this moment and asked him for the keys of his room.

"Is your baggage all fixed?" the man enquired.

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"My luggage is not yet packed," corrected Lord Warlingham. "But I shall have it ready this afternoon, after tea. Two portmanteaux, remember, a large cabin box, and a dressing-case, marked 'Viscount Warlingham'."

The porter ticked them off on his fingers.

"'Warlingham.' Two trunks, a valise and a small grip."

"And mind, they are to be at the station in good time, so you had better send them down in a van."

"That'll be all right," replied the other, in a reassuring voice. "I'll have them expressed to the depot in one of the hotel's delivery waggons."

"And there are my daughter's boxes, Miss Carruther's, too," added Lord Warlingham apologetically.

"That'll not trouble me any," said the man goodnaturedly.

"Oh, by the by," Lord Warlingham called him back rather nervously. "Here's something for your trouble." He pressed a bill into the man's hand.

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The latter did not appear to share any of the donor's confusion.

"That'll be all right," he said again, as he pocketed the tip.

As the porter moved away a bell-boy ran hurriedly across the Rotunda with a cablegram in his hand.

"Lord Bellinger!" he called in a loud nasal monotone. "Lord Bellinger!"

I stopped him as he was about to pass through the room and took the envelope from his hand.

Alas! As I read its contents I realised that my homecoming would be too late. I had indeed become Lord Bellinger.

(Editorial Note. The first Lord Bellinger died, as will no doubt be remembered, in the full vigour of his manhood, at the age of eighty-five, and would have been buried in Westminster Abbey if that edifice had not already been congested with a mixed crowd of celebrities and nonentities, or if the memory of the Salt-inghamborough Soap Scandal had not rankled in the public mind. His demise had been preceded, but a year before, by that of his second son Hugo Bellinger, who

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perished in his prime, pleasantly enough, of drink, at Monte Carlo. The title thus devolved upon the third son. So it was that at the age of five and thirty, while endeavouring to enjoy a brief holiday in the West, Richard de la Poer Bellinger suddenly succeeded to his father's title, and became the second Baron Bellinger of Thorley in the County of Kent.)

CHAPTER X.

THE RETURN (*Continued*)

CONSIDERING the circumstances in which it was undertaken, the sea journey from New York to Liverpool proved far more enjoyable than I could possibly have anticipated. Calm weather and the society of congenial companions combined to make the trip unusually delightful, and helped me momentarily to forget the sad loss I had so recently sustained.

Before starting, owing to the crowded condition of the ship, I had only been able to secure a small cabin on the lower deck. My sudden accession to the peerage, however, seems to have had a stimulating effect upon the officials of the line, and when I arrived on board I found myself almost immediately transferred to a large state-room on the main deck. Its original occupant, an elderly lady who was travelling round the world for the sake of her health, expressed some an-

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noyance at being moved below to my "inside" cabin; but, as I explained to her, my grief at being the unwilling cause of her discomfort did not justify me in taking it upon myself to instruct the Chief Steward in the duties of his office. I bowed to the inevitable, accepted without protest whatever accommodation was assigned to me, and recommended the old lady to follow my example.

During the course of the following week on board the *Sardonic* I got to know Lord Warlingham and his charming daughter more intimately than would ever have been the case on dry land, and the more I saw of them the more I liked them. I admit, of course, that it was the companionship of Miss Aline Carruthers that chiefly attracted me, but Lord Warlingham was himself a person whom it was impossible not to admire. He was a thorough man of the world, cheerful, good-natured and generous. A Tory of the old school, with plenty of money, an excellent digestion, an admirable taste in wine, and but few cares, he lived happily

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and contentedly at his Yorkshire seat, surrounded by faithful dependents who defrauded him with impunity, and with an adoring daughter whom he worshipped. He was a thorough optimist to whom the world appeared an altogether delightful place. He found no fault at all with the scheme of things, cordially agreeing that "whatever is, is best," and adding a private rider to the effect that whatever was *his* was necessarily best of all. His daughter, his horses, his property, his port, were all perfect in his eyes, since they belonged to him, and the ingenuous manner in which he habitually extolled his own possessions was quite charming if only by reason of its essential simplicity.

His illustrious ancestor, the first Lord Warlingham, had been a son of perhaps the largest-hearted of medieval English monarchs, who, following the curious custom of his time, omitted to register any official record of his union with that charming ancestress to whom the Warlinghams of to-day are so chary of allud-

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ing. He himself, the direct lineal descendant of this amorous sovereign, spent much of his time in the bow-window of that famous Pall Mall Club which seemed to have been fashioned by kindly Nature to fit his wellknown figure. But although one of the most prominent personages in the exclusive inner circle of what is technically known as London Society, Lord Warlingham was no drone. His name was given a prominent position upon the prospectus of many a commercial enterprise, and there was scarcely any new company floated in the City that did not appeal—and seldom in vain—for the honour of his distinguished patronage. Moreover, such was his natural business acumen that certainly more than half the companies of which he was a director were perfectly solvent, if they did not actually pay a dividend. Lord Warlingham attended Board Meetings and pocketed his fees with commendable regularity, but his time was so fully occupied with more important matters—notably golf—that he was rarely able to allow

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himself the luxury of taking any active part in the management of those concerns on whose directorate he sat.

When I first met Lord Warlingham he was a widower. His wife, well known in London society as one of the most hospitable of Lenten hostesses, had died when Miss Aline was quite a girl—the youngest of a family of six, of whom four were daughters.

The eldest son and heir met with a tragic end before he reached the age of thirty. He was a King's Messenger, and will be remembered as one of the victims of a terrible French railway accident, being killed while undertaking the perilous errand of carrying plovers' eggs to His Majesty at Biarritz. The second son had just left Oxford at the time of his mother's death, and was then engaged in eating his way to the Bar. Miss Aline's three elder sisters were all married. She herself was a girl of some two and twenty summers when we first become acquainted. Fair-haired and pretty, she possessed a fund of high spirits and an infectious laugh which

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was particularly charming. She had been "out" three or four seasons, and was already one of the most popular young women in society. As an amateur actress, so her father assured me, she was much in demand in country houses, and in the sacred cause of charity would frequently take a prominent part in those dramatic entertainments which are given at provincial Town Halls, when the takings seldom cover the incidental expenses. As an artist she also excelled, and would make clever charcoal drawings of her friends which their relations declared to be life-like portraits, but which they themselves referred to somewhat bitterly as caricatures.

Miss Carruthers took life easily and was of a very peaceful and serene disposition. There was, indeed, an air of sublime content about her which I found singularly delightful. This graceful quality of serenity—"vagueness" her father called it—surrounded her with an atmosphere of feminine helplessness which proved most attractive to the stern-

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er and less absent-minded sex. Just as women wish to find in those they love, as Matthew Arnold says, a soul which never sways with the blind gusts that shake their own, so do most men seek a certain timidity and indecision of purpose in the women for whom they propose to provide shelter and protection.

Miss Aline's natural vagueness had its drawbacks, certainly. Lord Warlingham declared that she was incorrigibly unpunctual, unbusinesslike, unpractical; that she could never remember where she had put things, and that when she did remember, they were never to be found in that particular spot. She daily mislaid her purse, her pencil, her bracelets, and left a trail of pocket-handkerchiefs behind her wherever she went. If she was given a letter to post (as she herself admitted), she would put it in her pocket—*poche restante*, she called it—and there it would remain indefinitely. Once a week in London she regularly visited the Lost Property Office at Scotland Yard to retrieve the umbrella or muff that she

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had left in a cab the day before, and would generally leave it in another cab on the way home.

It seemed as though such matters as catching trains or retaining property were too mundane to affect her with any idea of their importance. Indeed, she lived very much in the clouds. When, however, she descended to earth for a moment, as she did now and then, to listen to some remark addressed to her by a companion, there was a celestial smile upon her face which at once asked and obtained pardon for the irrelevancy of her reply.

Young men who made her acquaintance on deck, and who (being young and men) wished to talk exclusively about themselves, found her an attentive listener, but were often shocked to discover from the tenour of her subsequent remarks that she had not heard a single word of what they had been saying. To tell the truth, they were rather afraid of her, for she had a keen sense of the ridiculous, and they could never be quite sure

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whether she was laughing with them or at them. When the second officer began to make love to her one evening she smiled at him in so mysterious a manner, half maternal, half quizzical, that he at once became self-conscious and started talking feverishly about the weather. She thus lost many lovers, but made many friends.

It was, I believe, a great disappointment to her father that she had remained unmarried. Lord Warlingham had always hoped that she would marry well—that is to say that she would choose some titled personage as a husband. And though he was too rich to be mercenary, and much too fond of his youngest daughter to wish to get rid of her, it was, I fancy, to him a matter of regret that she should elect to remain a spinster after her three sisters had fulfilled the destiny of womankind by providing themselves with husbands, homes and children. All his other daughters had married well, with the single exception of the eldest, Constance, who ran away with a Colonial Bishop, and it seemed rather curious that

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Miss Aline, by far the best looking of the four, should be the last unplucked leaf upon the family branch.

In the saloon Hazelton and I joined Lord Warlingham and his daughter at the Captain's table. Ginger kept the ball of conversation perpetually rolling, and, while he monopolised the aged peer, I found opportunities for many a quiet tête-à-tête with Miss Carruthers. Hazelton's garrulity sometimes threatened to get him into serious trouble, more especially as he entertained the dubious theory that it was perfectly justifiable to be untruthful, if by so doing conversation could be stimulated or vivified. He would, for instance, frequently pretend to be intimately acquainted with friends of Lord Warlingham's, of whom he had never even heard, in order, as he said, to save trouble. This habit of claiming friendship with complete strangers occasionally involved him in situations from which it required all my tact to extricate him. Let me give an example.

"You know old Lady Matilda Bid-

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dulph," Lord Warlingham remarked, one morning at breakfast, as a preface to some anecdote on the subject of that estimable woman's eccentricities.

"Know her?" said Ginger with more enthusiasm than regard for truth. "She's my aunt!"

"Is that so?" replied the peer. "Then no doubt you can tell me how she is getting on."

"Oh—er—she's getting along splendidly," replied Hazelton nervously. "She's as gay as ever."

"Gay? Why, I thought she had only recently lost her husband."

"Oh yes, of course. When I said 'gay,' I didn't mean 'gay'; I meant gay considering everything. She bears up wonderfully."

"I have always wondered what became of her brother-in-law, old Colonel—Colonel—let me see, what was the name?" asked Lord Warlingham.

"Oh, him," said Ginger. "You mean Colonel—Colonel—er—dear me—"

"It's on the tip of my tongue," remarked the peer.

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"So it is on mine."

"Colonel—er—Parkins, no; Parkhurst—"

"Parkwell, Parkington, Parkford," suggested Ginger hopefully, "Parkborough, Parkstone, Park—"

"No, no," Lord Warlingham interrupted testily, "I remember now. Colonel Brown."

"Oh, of course," said Hazelton, much relieved. "Dear old Colonel Brown."

"I'm afraid he must be dead by this time," continued the peer.

"Oh yes," said Hazelton, "quite dead."

"Alas! We're none of us as young as we were," sighed Lord Warlingham. "Time flies!"

"Don't say that," replied Ginger gallantly. "Not in *your* society at any rate."

Lord Warlingham seemed somewhat astonished, but resumed.

"It's years since I visited Colonel Brown's place in Aberdeenshire. What was the name of it? I know quite well. Aber—something. Not Abergeldie."

"Aberladdie, Abernethy," said Ginger, "Aberfeldie, Aberloch, Aber—"

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"No, no." Lord Warlingham stopped him again. "I remember now, it begins with a B."

"Oh, that place," replied the other airily, drawing the long bow at a venture. "That was sold long ago."

"Sold!"

"Yes. After it was—er—burnt down."

"How odd that we should never have read about it in the papers. I thought the Browns were still living there. Young George Brown was a delightful boy. He can't be dead too."

"Oh yes," said Ginger, who was growing tired of the Brown family and had no desire for further discussion on the subject, "dead, quite dead. Found drowned. Didn't know it was loaded, and all that sort of thing!"

"Dead!" exclaimed Lord Warlingham and Miss Aline simultaneously.

Ginger realised that he had made a blunder. "Not really dead," he corrected himself. "We all thought he was dead. In fact—er—he thought so himself. But of course the report was untrue. We'd

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all given up hope. I'd even ordered a black hatband. He was at death's door, but the doctor pulled him through—I mean back. A sad case."

"What was the matter with him?" asked Miss Aline.

"Oh, only—er—smallpox, that's all."

"Smallpox!"

"At least we thought it was. He thought so himself. But of course it wasn't really. It was merely a chill."

"How very odd. You must have been terribly anxious."

"Oh yes, fearfully," Hazelton assented. "Of course you'll understand," he explained, "I didn't feel what I might have felt—er—if the—er—if I'd—er—felt differently." He broke off suddenly. "Perhaps," he added, "perhaps I'm not putting things very clearly."

"I think I follow you," said Lord Warlingham encouragingly.

"I'm afraid it's a long story," Ginger remarked, "but of course if you wish—"

"Never mind," interposed Miss Aline. "If you know the Browns so well, no

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doubt you can tell us the truth about poor Evelyn."

"Poor Evelyn," Ginger replied in a melancholy tone, wishing he had never heard that person's name before. "He and I were boys together!"

"But surely Evelyn was a girl?"

"Oh, ah, yes; we were girls together, I mean. That's to say, I was a boy together, and she was a girl—*altogether*."

"It was a sad accident, if I remember right," said Lord Warlingham. "I forget which arm she lost."

"Both," said Ginger firmly, anxious to be on the safe side.

"Both?"

"Yes, and both legs."

"But we never heard—" Miss Aline began.

"Ah no," he interrupted. "She keeps it dark. Won't let anyone find out."

"But how on earth can she help—"

"Ha!" replied Ginger mysteriously, "that's her secret!"

At this point, in response to an appealing glance, I came hurriedly to my friend's rescue.

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"Let's go on deck and see if there are any icebergs," I said to Miss Aline.

"Oh, do let's," was her reply.

Lord Warlingham and Ginger joined us later, and as they approached I heard the former ask Hazelton if he was well acquainted with America. As I knew that this was Ginger's first visit to that continent I was surprised when he replied that he had known it from childhood.

"I'm half American myself," he explained. "I was practically born on a ranch in Jonesville, Mo., or Me. or Ma.—I forget which."

"Indeed?" said Lord Warlingham. "I've always longed to visit the West. I suppose you spent most of your time there in the saddle?"

"Always in it. Never left it. From ten to four every day, with half an hour for luncheon; except of course on Sundays, or when there was an avalanche."

"What a wonderful life," said Miss Carruthers. "I expect you're a regular cowboy at heart."

"I am, oh, I am! I simply *love* cows—

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I mean, lassoing cows and—er—making Bovril, and all that sort of thing.”

“Did you ever have any terrifying adventures with desperadoes?” asked the girl.

“Fearfully terrifying.”

“Do tell me, have you ever shot a man?”

“Oh, once, or twice,” he answered airily.

“I remember you peppered me at Bel-linger when we were out after rabbits,” I began.

“What had the man done?” pursued Miss Aline, ignoring my interruption.

“I forget,” said Ginger. “I expect he’d annoyed me. They’re very annoying, some of them. I’ve had to speak to them rather sharply about it more than once.”

“Well,” said Lord Warlingham, “you must be glad to be getting back to civilization again; for I don’t suppose you had much society out in the West.”

“Nothing to speak of.”

“Weren’t there any women?” asked Miss Carruthers. “One always reads in Bret Harte—”

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"Oh, a few, of course—" I could see Ginger ransacking his memory for any recollection of the heroines of backwoods fiction. "There was—let me see—Rosalie, the Prairie Flower, and—er—some Indian squaws. But Dick knows more about squaws than I do."

"I don't know anything at all about them," I answered indignantly.

"Dick's so unconventional," he continued. "He snaps his fingers at the world. Show them how you snap your fingers, Dick."

"I won't," I said angrily. "I can't snap my fingers."

"Oh yes you can. Miss Carruthers, do ask him to snap his fingers. It's such fun."

"What a delightful life you must have led," said Miss Aline, disregarding his foolishness. "I can picture it all clearly. The bluff but honest miners, armed to the teeth, and you in the middle, the cow-puncher—"

"Ah yes, ah yes," exclaimed Ginger fervently, "quite a hobby of mine—cow-

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punching was. I just didn't care what sort of a cow it was; I'd give it *such* a punch! There was one in particular, her name was Margaret, an Alderney with one white stocking—but perhaps I ought not to tell you that story. Ah," he added, "those nights on the bounding prairie, with nothing but the howling of the coyote and the singing of the bullfrogs to hush one to sleep! However, I've shaken them off my feet now, thank goodness!"

"If you say you're half American," remarked Miss Carruthers, "I think it's rather unpatriotic of you to be so glad to get away from the land of your birth."

"Oh, but I'm frightfully loyal really. I love the Swanee River and Bill Bailey and the Old Folks at Home, and doughnuts and pea-nuts, and terrapin and seraphim, and canvas-backed clams and the Star-bangled spanner! I always take my hat off and stand bareheaded in the street for hours whenever the band plays 'Yankee Doodle.' "

"Does the band ever play it?" Lord Warlingham enquired with interest.

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"I don't think so," replied Ginger. "In fact, I hope not. But there's a band on board the boat, and we might ask it to. I haven't got a hat or you'd see how fearfully patriotic I am."

During our all too short journey across the Atlantic I found much to delight me in Lord Warlingham and his daughter, especially in the friendship which the latter and I gradually formed for one another. The incipient stages of an intimacy between two kindred souls are nothing less than sheer delight. The half timid confidences, the joyful surprise at the discovery of common tastes and interests, all the delicate subtleties of mutual intercourse, which bloom from the seed of a friendship newly sown, how sweet they are to the heart that is young enough to anticipate no disenchantment, and still hopes much and fears not at all! To youth each budding acquaintance affords a fresh source of enjoyment, a strange territory to be explored, hidden depths to be plumbed; each new friend is a potential lover. The soul that seeks its mate

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may find it in the most unexpected places and amid the most unpromising surroundings. Even the saloon of an Atlantic steamer holds an element of romance for those who have the grace to search for it and the good fortune to find it. With thoughts such as these in my mind I was dozing in my cabin one morning after breakfast when Hazelton brought me rather disturbing news.

It was about eleven o'clock on the last day of our voyage when he entered my cabin without knocking. I was still in bed and resented his intrusion, and so took no notice of my visitor.

"Hullo, Dick!" he cried heartily. "Good morning!"

I looked up for a moment out of the corner of my eye, and then once more closed that optic, nestled down among the bedclothes and commenced to snore.

"Wake up!" he shouted. "It's time to get up!"

"Hush!" I replied, still keeping my eyes tightly shut. "Don't disturb me. Can't you see that I'm saying my prayers?"

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"Don't be an ass!" Ginger poked me in the ribs with his foot.

"Since nothing is sacred to you," I said, turning round in bed, "take a chair."

Thus invited, he sat down on the sofa without observing that my clothes had been laid out there ready to be put on. On finding himself sitting upon the front of a white shirt he apologised profusely.

"Don't mention it," I replied, though I was rather vexed at his carelessness. "I prefer a spatchcocked shirt to the ordinary kind!"

"I hope I'm not disturbing you," he said.

"You are, but no matter. What can I do for you?"

"The fact is, Dick, old boy, I'm in trouble."

"How much do you want?" I asked.

"No, no," he replied indignantly, "this is no mere matter of money."

"What's the lady's name?"

"How did you guess?"

"Look here," I said, "before we proceed any more with the moving tale of

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your amours, let's settle one thing definitely. You want my advice, don't you? But do you really wish for my candid opinion? That's what I want to know."

"Oh, well," he answered hesitatingly, "if you put it like that—"

"Exactly," I interrupted. "I thought as much. Now, when you've finished your story, wake me up and tell me what you want me to advise, and I'll advise it. It'll be easier for me, pleasanter for you, and altogether more satisfactory in every way."

"Wake up!" he said firmly, as I prepared to resume my interrupted slumbers. "Wake up and listen. You see, Dick, it's like this. I'm most awfully in love."

"Really, Ginger, you're quite incorrigible."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"You're always in love."

"How can you say such a thing?"

"My dear Ginger, I've seen you through the illness a score of times."

"Oh, rot; besides, this time it's the real thing."

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"It always is," I said. "Do you remember how desperately you cared for Lady Mildred Burling?"

"Hang it all, I was only a boy of nineteen."

"You carried her photograph about in the back of your watch."

"I was only an infant, I tell you."

"What about Elsie Stair?" I pursued inexorably. "Was that calf-love too?"

"Oh, Elsie," he admitted, "well, after all, I was still very young. I own that I did think that I was in love with her, but of course I wasn't really. And I don't see why you should rake up these old affairs."

"I suppose you've forgotten all about that girl at the Gaiety?"

"Really, Dick, you know quite well that was altogether a different thing. Do be decent."

"All the same, you'd have married her, I believe, if it hadn't been for the war."

"Well, at any rate," he said, "you won't accuse me of being in love with anybody during the South African campaign."

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"For the best of reasons," I replied. "You didn't have the chance."

"That's where you're jolly well mistaken," he replied. "When I was in hospital at De Aar there was a ripping nurse—a lady too—who used to come and sit by my bedside for hours at a time. I've got her photograph somewhere."

"Has she got yours?"

"Yes—no—I don't know."

"Oh, Ginger, Ginger!"

"Anyhow, I've given up all that sort of thing long ago."

"Have you?" I replied. "There was a dizzy blonde from Chicago whom we met on the boat coming out."

"Nonsense," said Ginger angrily. "I was only ordinarily civil to her, that's all."

"If being ordinarily civil implies sitting on the bridgedeck at midnight holding a lady's hand—"

"Really, Dick! That one occasion you refer to was a pure accident."

"I suppose you've already forgotten all about poor Mrs. Carter-Pickford," I added unkindly.

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"No, I haven't. I'm awfully fond of her still. I really believe I'd have married her if she hadn't been married already."

"I'm glad you share the popular prejudice against bigamy. But we're wandering from the point. How do you want me to help you?"

"You see it's like this," said Ginger. "I'm awfully in love with Miss Carruthers."

I sat up in bed.

"Really, Ginger, you *are* incorrigible," I repeated. "If you were in your grave and there was another coffin within range I verily believe you'd tap on it and try to start a flirtation."

"This isn't a flirtation," he assured me. "I proposed to her last night."

"Good heavens! And I suppose she refused you."

"Yes, but I don't know why you should suppose anything of the sort. She told me she wasn't free."

"Not free?"

"It appears that she's partly engaged to her cousin Lord Banchory."

THE RETURN—CONTINUED

"What! Isn't he halfwitted?"

"Yes, and the other half I don't like. But I believe he's really quite a good fellow, and Lord Warlingham is very keen on the alliance. Miss Carruthers hasn't made up her mind. In fact I rather think she came abroad partly for the purpose of getting a little time to herself to think the matter over. Banchory's devilish rich, and as his father owns a huge property in the North of England it's about a thousand to one that he'll be offered an Undersecretaryship in the next Conservative Government."

"This is bad news," I replied.

"Dashed bad news—for me."

"And for me," I said.

"Why?"

"Because *I'm* in love with her too."

"Hang it all!" he exclaimed, "that isn't fair! You weren't in love ten minutes ago."

"Yes I was, and what's more I'm going to propose to her to-day."

"I'll never ask you for your advice again as long as I live," said Hazelton furiously.

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"That's right," I retorted brutally, "and shut the door after you."

He bounced out of the cabin, leaving the door wide open.

Left to myself I began to see that there was some element of truth in Ginger's accusation. Not to realise the value of anything until one is in danger of losing it is, I imagine, a common experience. As soon as I heard that Miss Carruthers was likely to be engaged to another man I became aware of the fact that I myself was badly in need of her.

I am not a man who cares to beat about the bush, and after dinner that evening I managed to lure Miss Aline to a deck-chair in a sheltered corner of the upper deck, and determined that she should not escape until I had heard from her own lips whether or not she was really pledged to Lord Banchory. She seemed to be conscious that I had something particular to say to her, and showed a strong disinclination to remain alone in my society. With some difficulty, however, I contrived to shake off Lord Warlingham and

THE RETURN—CONTINUED

Ginger Hazelton, and sat down beside her in the growing darkness.

We were both silent for a few moments. "What have you got on your mind?" I asked at length.

"Lots of things."

"Happy things?"

"Oh yes," she replied rather wistfully.

"Then why do you look so grave?"

"I don't know. Life is not very easy sometimes."

"Tell me."

She looked up at me with a smile. "I can't very well," she said. "You see, there are some things one has to settle all alone. No one can help."

"I somehow feel that a friend can help almost every time, don't you?"

"The fact is," she continued, "I've got to make up my mind about something. And that's never an easy matter."

I made no reply to this, being wise enough to say nothing that might stem the current of her speech. Silence so often extracts confidences where importunity only suggests caution and secrecy.

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"I—a great friend of mine," she went on, "a woman of my own age, has asked me for advice."

"Yes?"

She hesitated. "You see, she's not a girl any longer, and the years are passing by—and everybody tells her—"

"That she ought to get married?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I guessed. Is she happy?" I asked.

"Oh, in a sort of way. But sometimes she's—lonely, and—and her family want her to marry too."

"Just marry vaguely, d'you mean? Or is there someone—"

"Oh yes, there's someone. And of course—at least I suppose—*he* wants to marry her."

"Naturally. And what does *she* want?"

"She doesn't know what she does want, quite."

"Does she care about him?"

"She's fond of him, but not in that sort of way. He's her cousin, and very nice, I think, and she has told him that

THE RETURN—CONTINUED

perhaps if he will wait—she has given him to understand that perhaps—Oh, it's hard to explain," she broke off.

"And she has to give him an answer soon?" I said.

"Very soon," she answered. "You see, she doesn't think it fair to keep him hanging on. And yet," she mused, "I wonder whether she wouldn't be wiser to marry a man she is good friends with, whom she believes to be straight and true, rather than wait until—"

"Until she meets someone she can fall in love with."

"That's impossible!" she laughed. "'Mr. Right,' as the nurses say, will never 'come along.'"

"Isn't there any other friend—a man, say—whom she could consult?" I asked.

"No. I don't think so. No friend, that is, who wouldn't perhaps be prejudiced one way or the other."

"I expect you're right," I said, after a moment's thought. "No man willingly advises a girl to get married. The responsibility is too great, in the first place; in the second, it means the loss of a friend."

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Miss Carruthers looked up at me enquiringly.

"I've always found it so," I went on. "I've made a few good friends in my life, of unmarried women and men. But directly they married, a sort of a barrier seemed to rise between us. We were both of us aware of it, and sorry about it too, I think. But it couldn't be helped. There's just as great a gulf fixed between the married and the single as there is between the sexes, and nothing can ever bridge it."

"But surely you have many real friends who are married?" she asked.

"I have a few. But they were already married when we made friends. What I mean is—"

"Yes, I see what you mean," said Miss Aline, "you mean that if *I* were to get married, for instance, you and I would cease to be friends in the same sort of way."

"Exactly. So you see I'm 'prejudiced,' to quote your words."

"And you won't advise me about my friend?"

THE RETURN—CONTINUED

"I won't advise you about yourself."

"Miss Aline," I added, in answer to her look of surprise, "I've known all along who your friend is, and perhaps you knew that I knew—"

"I didn't, I didn't!" she insisted.

"Then will you listen to me?"

With woman's instinct of selfdefence she seemed inclined to resist.

"Isn't it rather damp sitting here?" she said weakly.

"No," I replied firmly.

"You ask me whether I mind your marrying," I continued. "I can only answer that there's nothing in the world I should mind so much."

She looked anxiously into my face as though to read my thoughts, and held up her hand, intuitively divining what was coming.

"You won't say anything to spoil our friendship, will you?" she cried hastily.

For answer I took her hand in mine. When she attempted to draw her fingers away my grasp only tightened.

"I must risk that," I said. "I know I've

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no right to say anything of this kind. But I just want you to know that I love you. I have loved you, I think, ever since that day we met in the train, do you remember?"

"Stop, stop! I beg of you. And let go of my hand, please. Fancy if anyone were to see us!"

"There's nobody on deck."

"One of the stewards."

"I don't care for a thousand stewards."

"Very likely not. But I do. Oh, Lord Bellinger, you've spoilt everything. I thought we were always going to be such good friends, and now—but you don't know me at all," she added with an indignation which seemed to be struggling with her sense of the ridiculousness of the situation.

"I know myself pretty well by this time. And I know that I love you, and that's enough."

"Really, Lord Bellinger—"

"I didn't mean to tell you about it just yet awhile, Miss Aline, but what you have told me about yourself—"

THE RETURN—CONTINUED

"What on earth have I told you about myself?"

"That you had an idea of getting married. And I hate the thought of it."

"Do you want me to remain a spinster all my days?" she asked, trying to turn the thing off as a joke.

"I want you to marry me."

She laughed softly.

"If you didn't look so serious," she declared, "I should think you were jesting."

"I'm in earnest, dead earnest. Oh, of course, I know it must surprise you—"

"What? That anyone should want to marry me?"

"No. But that I should propose so unexpectedly. Miss Aline, I want you to promise me not to do anything in a hurry."

"I really don't see why I should promise you anything at all."

"I've no right to ask it, and you've every right to be angry with me, but I'm so much in love with you that I'll risk your anger. It would be foolish of me to say that I'm not the sort of man you ought

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to have for a husband, because no man in the world can be good enough for that. But I love you, and I mean to marry you—”

“Mean to marry me?” she repeated indignantly. “Really, I—”

“Please don’t say it,” I interrupted her. “I know you haven’t thought of me at all, except as a friend, and I’m not asking you to give me an answer. I too can wait till the end of Time if necessary, and I’m hopeful enough to think that if I love you hard enough and long enough you may some day—”

“I ought to be very grateful to you, Lord Bellinger,” she broke in, “but really I’m terribly sorry this has happened. I had no idea—”

“I didn’t mean that you should. I wouldn’t have said a word, only circumstances hurried things on.”

Miss Aline rose from her chair.

“We must be getting back to the saloon,” she added. “It’s nearly twelve o’clock.”

“Will you think over what I’ve said,”

THE RETURN—CONTINUED

I asked earnestly, "and remember that I am willing to wait?"

"If you like. But I can tell you now that it's not very much use. Don't be angry with me. You know I like you very much, and I want us two to be good friends."

"But—"

"Please, Lord Bellinger," she implored, as we descended to the companion, "don't let us talk about it any more."

"As you will," I replied.

The journey came to an end on the following morning. We all travelled up to London from Liverpool together, and at Euston Station we said goodbye with many expressions of friendship and regret. I had no opportunity for any further conversation with Miss Aline, but as I shook her hand at the station, while Lord Warlingham was busy saying farewell to Hazelton, she looked up at me with a curiously sympathetic light in her eyes.

"Did you really mean what you said last night?" she asked. "Will you really wait?"

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"Till the end of time," I replied.

"Please wait," she said gently, as she turned away.

CHAPTER XI.

HOME AGAIN.

FROM Euston station I drove straight to Bellinger House to see my mother.

"Is Lady Bellinger at home?" I asked the butler.

"Yes, m'lord," he replied.

It was not until I heard these last unaccustomed words that I fully realised the complete change that had come over my life, and understood the heavy responsibilities that Time had laid upon my shoulders. Providence moves in a mysterious way its wonders to perform, but I have gradually come to recognise the fundamental justice that controls the world, and I think I understand why it is that Fate chose me from many millions of others—even from my own immediate family—to take my place in the highest council chamber of the land, side by side with all those who, like myself,

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have been Providentially selected to control the destinies of the Empire.

My advent in London, as I discovered to my cost, had been heralded by long articles in the halfpenny press, which gave fanciful descriptions of my appearance and habits, and romantic accounts of my sudden accession to the title. According to one of the most imaginative of these papers, the "Prairie Peer," as I was called—for no ostensible reason except that I had recently returned from Vancouver—had been branding bronchos on his ranch in the wild and woolly West when the news of his good fortune was brought to him by a breathless despatch-rider. Without a moment's hesitation he flung his leg across the back of his favourite buckjumper, and rode day and night over the plains until he finally reached the coast. Here he either chartered a special steamer, or else worked his passage in the stokehole of a liner (the *Daily Reflector* was not quite certain upon this point), and eventually landed at Liverpool, attired in fringed buckskin

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trousers and a sombrero hat. "It was a strange homecoming for the son of one of England's greatest statesmen," said the journal in question, "and we are fortunate in being able to supply our readers with a portrait of this noble scion of a noble house who, after so many years of wandering in the backwoods, has come into his own at last." The accompanying photograph represented a most villainous-looking bushranger, backed by an inset of a log-cabin in which I had never dreamt of being born.

From the moment of my arrival in London communications poured in upon me by every post. By far the larger portion of this correspondence consisted of begging letters, dealing with every conceivable form of mortal woe and describing every phase of human tragedy. I was amazed at the number of apparently respectable persons (with huge families) who had lost one or more of their limbs, and relied upon my bounty for that small sum which should provide them with permanent employment and keep

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their children from the workhouse. I was naturally inclined towards indiscriminate charity, but had been taught by Christian parents that philanthropy of this kind is merely selfish, and that it is better that ten deserving persons should starve than that one fraud should be encouraged. I therefore referred a selection of the most plausible cases to the Charity Organisation Society, with the inevitable results.

For the first two months in England my time was fully occupied with domestic affairs—notably the payment of heavy death-duties and the transference of my dear mother to the Dower House whither she was somewhat reluctant to move. In some slight measure to console her for so distasteful a change I presented her with my grandfather's entire collection of stuffed birds—I had offered them to South Kensington Museum but they had been politely declined—and for some months the front hall of the Dower House was congested with moulting puffins.

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Bellinger Hall had but recently been rebuilt and refurnished, and I spent many hours there in consultation with Mr. Minting, my agent, discussing matters affecting the management of the estate.

I think I may truthfully say that my tenants and employés have always found me a just landlord and a kindly master. If during the last few years I have been forced to discharge a good many of the older men on the estate, it is only because a scoundrelly Radical government has imposed a rascally super-tax which has forced me to cut down my establishment, to curtail my charities, and generally to economise at the expense of others. Ignorant persons who read in the lower-class papers that my income is about £40,000 a year, very possibly assume that I am therefore a very wealthy man. They do not realise the expense of living in the style to which I have always been accustomed, which I cannot reduce without grave injury to my dependants. My *chef*, for instance, draws

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a salary of £450 a year. The upkeep of Bellinger House, Mayfair—Bellinger Hall and the estate are, I am glad to say, selfsupporting—forms no inconsiderable item of my expenditure. The rearing of pheasants costs me another £2,000 a year. The cost of maintaining four motors, as well as a stable full of horses, is a very heavy one. And when I have paid for all this and for my box at the Opera, and have sent my annual subscriptions to the dozen or so of clubs to which I belong, to the King's Hospital Fund, the Central Conservative Organisation, the Land Defence Association and the Tariff Reform League, and have set aside an annual £3,000 or £4,000 to enable my heirs to pay the iniquitous death-duties, I don't suppose I have more than at the outside £8,000 a year left for current expenses. Indeed, I am often tempted to envy poorer men with, say, four or five thousand a year, who have no position to keep up and can spend their entire income upon themselves.

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I have always regarded the money I inherited from my father as a trust of the most sacred kind, and have tried to use my wealth to the best of my ability for the furtherance of the public weal. Only last year I presented the village of Thorley with a pump and drinking-trough, much to the delight of the inhabitants who up till then had watered their cattle in the river Chouse, thereby muddying the stream and doing much damage to my trout-fishing. My hospitality has always been of a lavish nature. At Bellinger Hall I entertain those of my tenants who pay their rents regularly at an annual luncheon where they enjoy cucumber sandwiches, cider-cup and other luxuries which they cannot obtain at home. The only return for my hospitality which I demand on such occasions is the polite attention of my guests for a few moments after luncheon while I take the opportunity of making them a nonpartisan speech intended to foster that spirit of patriotism which shows signs of dying out in the country dis-

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tricts. My agent, Mr. Minting, who is a true Imperialist at heart—and by Imperialist I mean a man who realises that England is on its last legs and will shortly become a fifth-rate power unless some alteration is made in our present fiscal system—usually writes this speech for me.

Once a year, too, I give a big garden-party at Bellinger, to which I invite all “the neighbours,” those tiresome people on whose behalf it has been deemed necessary to frame a special commandment urging us to the impossible task of loving them as ourselves.

As Colonel of the local Yeomanry many demands are made upon my purse. The corps which I have the honour to command is certainly, from the point of view of its uniform and general appearance on parade, the smartest of all the Territorial units. I spare no expense to ensure efficiency. When we go to camp for a brief summer training, every tent is lighted with electricity and the officer’s mess-hut is decorated with the

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rarest hot-house plants from the gardens of Bellinger. Need I say that my recruiting sergeants have no difficulty in inducing the gallant men of Thorley, of Burlingford and the whole Tilwood country, to show their public spirit by sacrificing a week of their employers' time amid the luxurious surroundings with which I seek to repay their patriotism?

Persons who know little or nothing of the myriad duties of a country squire may often fancy the life of a landowner to be a leisurely and altogether agreeable existence. They think, perhaps, that he does but little hard work, forgetting that his responsibilities are many and onerous, especially in these socialistic days when everything is being done to make it impossible for a man to enjoy the ownership of property without paying for it. I may possibly show that the wealthy are not relieved of that labour which is the common lot of humanity if I give a brief account of a typical day of my life at Bellinger.

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I usually rise early and have breakfast at about half-past nine, or at ten o'clock in the winter. The morning, up till nearly noon, is devoted to a perusal of the papers and the answering of my correspondence by Mr. Minting. I may then perhaps stroll down to the ornamental water in the park to feed the swans, or proceed to the keeper's cottage where I probably learn that the recent drought (or the heavy rain) has killed the young partridges or that the retriever puppies have died of distemper. After giving the necessary orders that more birds or dogs be obtained from London I return to luncheon, looking in at the stables on my way. In the afternoon I very likely order a motor out to take me down to the Home Farm to superintend the erection of a new pigsty. On my way home I often drop in at the Dower House to see my mother, or at the cottage of one of my tenants to ask after the children. I believe in keeping in the closest possible personal touch with my dependants, and Mr. Minting has often assured me

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how much their wives look forward to these little surprise visits of mine, unless they happen to coincide with washing-day. I get back home to tea at about five o'clock, pleasantly tired, and the rest of the day is given up to recreation, reading (of which I am very fond) or billiards.

A great deal of nonsense was talked at the last General Election on the subject of the intimidation alleged to be practiced by landlords. I for one have made an especial point of allowing my tenants and employés perfect freedom of thought, as long as they do not take too great an advantage of my tolerance. I should be the last person in the world to interfere with their political views or opinions, except by an occasional timely word of warning or advice. At the same time, as a man of principle I feel it my bounden duty to make it quite plain to them that the return to power of a Radical government means a reduction of my staff and a consequent loss of employment to many, to say nothing of the inevitable raising of rents to

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meet the additional expense entailed in the payment of those spoliatory taxes which are now levied on all landed property.

Of my personal popularity with my household and employés there is, I am glad to say, no doubt. At Christmas I generally give an umbrella to each of the footmen, and a Russia-leather purse to the housekeeper, and make suitable gifts of a similar nature to the other servants. Every labourer on the estate who has reached the age of ninety without receiving "parish relief" is presented with a brace of rabbits. After a big day's pheasant shooting at Bellinger I send to the local hospitals all the birds that are too badly damaged to be marketable, and at the New Year I generally despatch a couple of pheasants or a hare to the vicar of Thorley as well as to the stationmaster.

Though a Conservative in politics I have always been intensely interested in social problems, and should like to see something definite done to better the condition of the poor. I remember once dis-

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cussing the whole question with my cousin, Lord Burfield, one evening, before going on to the Empire to see a new ballet. We dined at a cheap little place near Piccadilly Circus where one can get an excellent meal for under a sovereign, not including wine. I told Burfield that I had sometimes been rather worried by the thought of the number of people poorer than myself, of the vast amount of starvation and poverty that still existed in the world. He cheered me a good deal, however, by saying that social inequalities had always existed and always would exist, and that it was a great mistake to think too much about things which nothing could possibly remedy. It was an immutable decree of Providence that there should be rich and poor, he said, and the position must be accepted. I remember remarking that I had often wondered how poor labourers on my own estate could keep their wives and children on wages which often amounted to a bare eighteen shillings a week. Burfield assured me that living was very cheap in the country, and

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food ridiculously inexpensive, and that the poor were a thriftless lot whom it was a crime to pamper. If you raised their wages, he said, they only spent the advance on drink. A labourer with an eighteen shilling wage and a clever wife could easily manage to put by sixpence a week, if he were economical and did not eat meat; and at the end of the year he would be the possessor of more than a pound, with which he might subscribe to some fund that should provide him with a pension when overwork and lack of proper sustenance had rendered him no longer able to earn his living. Burfield himself owns a large property in one of the poorest districts in London—it is managed for him, ably (I believe) but somewhat rigorously, by a man called Eckstein. He therefore knows what he is talking about, and I was much interested in his views. Any further discussion of the subject was put a stop to by the discovery that our second bottle of champagne was slightly corked. It was a good wine—costing seventeen shillings the bot-

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tle—and we were half way through it before we found out that something was wrong with it. By the time we had rebuked the waiter and finished the new bottle with which the bad one was replaced, it was time to go on to the Empire, and we had to postpone the discussion of social problems to some more suitable occasion.

It must not be imagined that my whole time was given up to the consideration of domestic affairs which, however important to myself and my dependants, cannot be regarded as of vital moment to my country. My duties as hereditary legislator soon called me to the House of Lords, and when I had once taken my seat in that august assembly I became a regular attendant at debate.

Proud as I am of that Upper Chamber which so conscientiously carries out the will of the people whenever a Conservative government is in power, or, when the Radicals are in office, saves the nation from the consequences of its own folly, I must truthfully admit that there is about

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it an atmosphere which is anything but stimulating to a speaker. I delivered my maiden speech to an audience composed of the Lord Chancellor, the Clerks at the Table and seven peers—two of whom left abruptly after I had been speaking but a short half hour—and this rather dreary experience did not tempt me to any further flights of oratory. I found, indeed, that my party Whips were seldom anxious for any of the younger men to speak; we had too many orators on our side already, they told me, and it has never been the policy of the Lords to prolong debate unduly or to extend it beyond the dinner hour. In this respect the Upper House presents a singular contrast to the Commons, where time is freely wasted in futile eloquence which has no effect whatsoever on the result of divisions. We Lords are a businesslike body, and often take less than a week to throw out some Radical Bill which the Commons have debated for several months. Again, when the Conservatives are in power, an important and complicated piece of legisla-

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tion is sometimes passed by the Upper House without amendment, in a single day. Nothing, in fact, is so marked as the practical manner in which the Lords—so often wrongly accused of lethargy—will, so to speak, wake up at the end of a session, when the holidays are approaching, and either pass Conservative measures or reject Liberal measures with a celerity and unanimity that are altogether admirable.

It must not be thought from what I have said that the debates in the Lords are always distinguished by sparse attendance and a lack of oratory. On great occasions, as for instance when some important Radical Bill which has passed the Commons by a huge majority is sent up to be thrown out, the Gilded Chamber is filled to overflowing with those peers who are ready to sacrifice comfort and convenience, at least once a year, in the cause of Empire.

The first occasion of this kind when I attended the debate was made peculiarly interesting to me, not only by the sight of

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all those eminent men unselfishly gathered together for Imperial purposes, but by the opportunity it afforded me of renewing the acquaintance of many whom I had not seen since I left Eton. It was then that I met Lord Whitchurch, who had been my fag at school and was still more famous afterwards for having run through three immense fortunes in less than three years. His third term of bankruptcy was, I am glad to say, at an end, and he was thus once more able to take his place among his fellow legislators. Lord Byfleet, too, I was pleased to see, for his eccentricities of conduct have caused him to spend too much of his life in retirement in a Home. Though a Court of Law has adjudged him unfit to manage his own affairs, Byfleet is a very good fellow at heart, and it was pleasant to know that an occasional release from that restraint imposed upon him by his relations would allow him to record his vote in the Imperial Legislature. I could not but regret the fact, however, that he insisted upon occupying a prominent place on the

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front Opposition bench, as his habit of sitting with his eyes shut and his tongue hanging out of his mouth adds little to the dignity of his appearance.

Among those with whom I could not claim acquaintanceship but was nevertheless interested to see were many celebrities of whom I had often read. Among these were the leaders on both sides, able, brilliant, painstaking men, inspired by a strong sense of duty to themselves—the solid backbone upon which the House and the nation can always depend—to say nothing of other less able but more notorious peers. Here, for instance, was Lord Slaugham, with whom divorce has become more of a habit than an event—his marriage with his fourth wife was quite one of the most interesting of last year's society functions; Lord Thrapstone, who was found guilty of writing a friend's name upon a cheque, and bound over to come up for judgment if called upon, it being rightly considered that the shame of committing such a crime was a sufficient punishment for a man of his social stand-

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ing; Lord Blisworth, who, on the strength of possessing an acre of land and two gum-trees in the West Indies, floated the Yumata Rubber Company whose collapse ruined so many domestic servants. Here too, was Lord Lythe and Saythe (formerly Sir Benjamin Salmon), who so generously offered to subscribe £50,000 to the scheme for a National Opera House, on condition that a thousand other people would do the same; old Lord Bletchley, who, though eighty-nine years of age and mentally deficient, is still able to touch his toes with his fingers without bending his knees; the eccentric Lord Meopham who shot his coachman in the back with a revolver because that domestic happened to take a wrong turning in Park Lane; Lord Swaffield, who as Sir Moses Hamilton earned a worldwide reputation by walking down the Duke of York's steps on his hands for a wager; Lord Dunbridge, famous as the husband of Lady Dunbridge whose enthusiasm for the cause of Woman's Suffrage has caused her to cut her hair off, and to take her meals

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in a liquid form and exclusively through the nose; Lord Brancaster, who as Sir Thomas Tilling failed seven times to get into parliament—though he stood impartially on both sides—but who on the death of his uncle at last earned the reward of patriotism and became a true representative of the people; and a host of others.

I felt it a great privilege to be included in an assemblage so representative of every class of thought and adorned by such an interesting and varied collection of persons. Though I was not fated to see most of them again until quite recently when they rallied once more to withstand the machinations of a socialistic government, I have always cherished an affectionate memory of the unique experience which, coming as it did at the very outset of my political career, provided me with an admirable opportunity of appreciating the full grandeur and perfection of our great Constitutional system.

CHAPTER XII.

THE END.

I SPENT the next twelve months of my life quietly but enjoyably at home. It did not take me very long to grow accustomed to my newly acquired honours, to the respect with which I was treated by social inferiors and the deference which my title evoked from shop-assistants. Owing to my recent bereavement I was naturally disinclined to join in the gaieties of the London season, and religiously kept away from theatres, dances and other social gatherings. I saw little harm, however, in joining with a few familiar friends in an occasional party to the Earl's Court Exhibition, whither I was more than once privileged to escort Miss Carruthers and her father.

The latter had conceived a passionate fancy for a pastime, then much in vogue among elderly persons, which was known as "Wiggling the Woggle." This con-

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sisted in being rolled down a steep incline in a barrel, and proved most amusing to the onlookers. I encouraged the aged peer in this harmless predilection, and with Miss Aline would often sit on a bench at the Exhibition for an hour or so after dinner while her father fought his way through the surging crowd that was struggling to pay its sixpences for the privilege of being severely woggled. Lord Warlingham spent as much as four shillings one evening upon this engaging but rather violent form of amusement, and returned to us in a most dishevelled but elated condition after his eighth journey in the barrel.

I was also fortunate enough to be alone with Miss Carruthers in a car on the "Great Wheel" on one of the occasions when by a merciful dispensation of Providence something went wrong with the machinery. The seven hours we spent together, at an altitude so great that the remarks of Lord Warlingham on the ground below failed to reach us, did much to cement our friendship.

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Lord Warlingham was an enthusiastic but indifferent golfer, and would often insist upon taking me down to some course near London to spend a happy day on the links. Besides being a bad player who only brought off an occasionally good stroke by accident, he was also an extraordinarily slow one. He took several minutes "addressing" the ball, having previously rehearsed his stroke on an adjacent tuft of grass, while the whole course waited. Another cause of delay was his habitual vacillation. He could never decide which club to use until he had changed his mind on the subject at least three times, much to the annoyance of his caddy. On the "green" he would practise over and over again the "putt" he had just missed, regardless of the fury of the players behind him, whose game was thus indefinitely prolonged. Playing with him was consequently a somewhat doubtful pleasure which only my devotion for his daughter rendered tolerable.

After a day's golf with Lord Warlingham I sometimes dined at his house, and

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thus had further opportunities of meeting Miss Carruthers. I was also enabled to make the acquaintance of Lady Frederick Hungerton, her aunt, who afterwards proved a very useful ally.

Ever since the death of Lady Warlingham, her widowed sister, Lady Frederick Hungerton, had kept house for the bereaved husband and been a nominal mother to Miss Aline. The passing of the Deceased Wife's Sister Act had caused some consternation in the Warlingham household, but left its master quite unmoved. Prudish friends assured him that he could no longer dream of living under the same roof as Lady Frederick, now that the law had rendered it possible for him to make her his wife. But Lord Warlingham only laughed, and declined to make any change in his mode of life. One had only, he said, to look at Lady Frederick, who certainly possessed but few physical attractions, to realise the absurdity of imagining that anybody would ever be likely to insult her, least of all her own brother-in-law. She would be just as safe

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now from his advances as she had been at any time during the last four years, and that was saying a good deal.

Lady Frederick herself was rather upset, but a consultation with the Rev. Theobald Gudgeon, the High Church clergyman to whom she occasionally confessed, reassured her. Father Gudgeon would not admit the possibility of any marriage with a deceased wife's sister. Was she not, in the eyes of the Church, flesh of her brother-in-law's flesh and bone of his bone? He took the opportunity of denouncing in no measured terms those unfortunate persons, in the Colonies and elsewhere, who were misguided enough to contravert such a statement. He knew Lady Frederick too well, he said, to suspect her of harbouring any leanings towards matrimony; she would certainly never be attracted by any relationship of which the Church disapproved so strongly.

Lady Frederick Hungerton was one of those timid, retiring women who are intended by Nature to remain spinsters.

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Married life had never agreed with her, and at her husband's death she had assumed a widow's cap with a feeling of distinct relief.

Lord Frederick Hungerton had been a large and rather brusque individual, who smoked his pipe all over the house, and shouted at the servants. His wife on the other hand was a delicate piece of Dresden ware, and trembled at the very sound of the heavy (and often muddy) tread of her husband's boots upon the drawing-room carpet. The alliance of this ill-matched pair was about as appropriate as that of a bull and a china-shop, and when Lord Frederick succumbed to gout at the age of sixty-eight he left his wife a confirmed widow. He did not leave her much else, however, and on the death of her sister, Lady Warlingham, she gladly availed herself of her brother-in-law's kindly offer that she should come and live with him and manage his domestic affairs.

Lady Frederick might truthfully have been styled the Queen of Commonplace.

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She was never at a loss for an unoriginal remark, uttered with smile of quiet triumph which raised the dreariest truism to the level of an epigram, without robbing it of its natural dignity as a platitude. She had, indeed, reduced conversation of the fluent obvious type to an exact science, so that all who knew her well could anticipate her criticisms with absolute correctness. She never wearied of declaring that there was nothing so cheerful as a wood fire, that the poor were always with us, that the carrying of an umbrella was sufficient to prevent rain, that it was impossible to shake off a summer cold or to obtain good coffee in England, and was continually expressing surprise at the smallness of the world. "This soup" she would say at the beginning of dinner, "is a meal in itself"; or "The only way to get workmen out of the house is to move in oneself"; or "I suppose we shall all be flying soon."

She was the victim of frequent bouts of devotion, and would periodically retire into a "Home" kept by a worthy Protes-

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tant sisterhood, under the superintendence of Father Gudgeon, where she underwent a refreshing course of religious rest cure.

Lady Frederick and I soon became fast friends. I often called at tea-time to discuss the Education Bill with her, and was easily persuaded that Nonconformist rate-payers deserved neither pity for themselves nor instruction for their children.

When I suggested taking Miss Aline to a concert or a picture gallery, Lady Frederick very nobly undertook the duties of chaperone, though neither form of entertainment appealed to her. One morning, indeed, she was much shocked at being dragged to a small gallery in Bond Street where a number of paintings of the impressionist school of thought were being exhibited by a French artist whose sole claim to recognition lay in his persistent inability to obtain any kind of encouragement at the hands of the hanging committee of the Paris Salon. His pictures for the most part represented atmospheric effects of sunset and dawn—the main results of the artist's efforts suggesting to-

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mato salads or sections of a peculiarly unhealthy brand of cheese—and were extremely popular among all true lovers of art. One in particular that attracted an unusual amount of attention was the portrait of a woman of uncertain years and character who appeared to be suffering from some species of acute mind trouble, and was represented as seated at a small table contemplating a glass containing a bilious green fluid of which she had apparently been partaking by suction with the aid of a straw. This was a clever picture, but Lady Frederick could hardly bear to stay in the same room with it.

One Sunday morning in June, about a year after my succession to the title, I happened to take up the newspaper after breakfast. My eye was at once arrested by a head-line which was not then as common as it has since become.

PEER TO WED ACTRESS

were the words that attracted my attention and forced me to read on. "Many congratulations (I read) are being show-

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ered upon Miss Peril Berkeley of the Minerva Theatre whose romantic engagement to the Earl of Banchory has just been announced. Miss Berkeley is well known to the public as a talented member of the Minerva Musical Comedy Company which, under the able direction of Mr. John Williams, has recently achieved so notable a success with 'The Girl from Over the Sea.' During the run of this piece, now in its fourth year, she has understudied Miss Gertrude Hamilton in the part of Thérèse on two occasions, and by her rendering of those deservedly popular songs "Snowdrops" and "Kiss me and I'll kiss you," has evinced great dramatic promise. We understand, however, that on her marriage Miss Berkeley (who in private life is known to her friends as Miss Ada Wilkins) intends to bid farewell to the footlights. Her fiancé, the Earl of Banchory, who is the eldest son of the Marquis of Cantire, is a keen chessplayer and big-game hunter, and his collection of picture-postcards is generally considered

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to be the finest in the world. He was for two years a second-lieutenant in the 5th (Militia) Battalion of the Loyal East Hunts Fusiliers, but resigned his Commission just before the South African War. Lord Banchory's family is one of the oldest in the Kingdom, and he will eventually inherit Drumcleugh Castle, Perth; Hamley Place, Lincoln; Claverton Hall, Surrey; Drumwhistle Lodge, Oban; Ravenscourt, Glos; Stourton Abbey, Lancs; Castle Larney, Co. Mayo, Ireland; and Rhiywgollen, Wales."

I threw the paper down with a cry of joy. At last I could be certain that Miss Carruthers had rejected her cousin, that the marriage between them would never take place, and that she was free. I felt as though a heavy load had been lifted from my breast.

Since our transatlantic journey Miss Aline and I had never discussed the question of her quasi-engagement. I had been on the point of broaching the subject once or twice, but had felt instinctively that she did not wish to talk about it, and that

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I should be wiser to remain silent. Hazelton, however, had met Lord Banchory at a dance given at the Savoy by a number of ladies of the Musical Comedy stage, and told me that, as far as he could judge, the young peer showed no signs of allowing his love for Miss Aline, if it existed, to absorb his whole attention. I was therefore inclined to hope that by a patient and persistent display of devotion I might yet win the reward which I sought so diligently.

On the afternoon of this same Sunday I had promised to take Miss Aline and her aunt Lady Frederick Hungerton to the Zoological Gardens to inspect a new chimpanzee which was being much talked about in society. I had been invited to luncheon at Lord Warlingham's house, and during that meal I noticed that his daughter seemed to be unusually silent and depressed. In the afternoon Lady Frederick motored us down to Regent's Park.

We arrived there soon after three o'clock and shortly afterwards Miss Car-

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ruthers and I managed very cleverly to lose our chaperone in the Sloth House, where I regret to say she spent most of the afternoon with no other sustenance than that which could be derived from a bag of nuts which I had pressed into her hand at parting.

Miss Aline and I meanwhile found a quiet bench near the larger mammals, and were so engrossed in conversation that we did not become aware of the passage of time until a neighbouring clock chimed seven. We then hastily made our way to the North Entrance where we found poor Lady Frederick in a state of utter collapse. She had reached her last nut, and, after searching for us high and low for four hours, was beginning to think that we must have fallen victims to some anthropophagous creature, and that she would have to return alone to break the news to the family. We cheered her up as best we could, and though at first inclined to repel our apologies, she quickly relented when we told her the good tidings which we had originally intended to

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keep secret until we had obtained Lord Warlingham's consent.

There are some things too sacred to be put on paper, and I have no intention of describing the final stages of my courtship, culminating in the sublime moment when I proposed once more to Aline and was accepted. What I said on that occasion is known to two individuals only—if we except the hippopotamus which appeared to regard the proceedings with unusual interest from the corner of its grated paddock—and will never be divulged to a wider circle. It is enough for the reader to be told that Aline and I became engaged that afternoon at the Zoo, that the engagement was announced the next day in the *Morning Post*, and that two months later we were made man and wife, when Ginger Hazelton, although he never quite forgave me for cutting him out, consented to be my "best man."

The marriage ceremony was performed three times; first of all at the Brompton Oratory, to satisfy the claims of Lord Warlingham's family, who were Roman

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Catholics; secondly at St. Margaret's, Westminster, to please my Aunt, Lady Preston, who was a devout Protestant and very wealthy; and lastly at a Registry Office, to make things quite safe.

"Well, my boy," said my uncle, Sir Claud Ventrigorm, greeting me with a slap on the back as, with Aline and Hazelton, I descended the steps of the last-named institution, "How's the world treating you, eh? One doesn't get married every day of one's life, eh what?"

"Bellinger seems to!" replied Ginger somewhat humorously, as he helped Aline into the motor.

That afternoon my wife and I left for Paris en route for Fontainebleau where the first week of our married life was to be spent. When at length we reached the bright little sitting-room in the Hotel des Princes and found ourselves alone, with the door tightly shut upon us, Aline turned to me and held out her arms. I bent down and kissed her, and then put my arms round her and kissed her again.

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"Isn't it perfectly wonderful?" I asked.

"It's the most wonderful thing in the world!" said Lady Bellinger.

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